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643 games rated inside!

NEXT GENERATION

The world's #1 computer and videogame authority

June 1998

Nintendo's link to the past revealed

After years in development, Shigeru Miyamoto's greatest creation will redefine the art of 3D action/adventures forever

volume four
42

Reviewed

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1080° Snowboarding • Diablo PSX
Battlezone • Grand Theft Auto

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ESPN Sports debuts • **Katana** update • **Bond is back** in *Tomorrow Never Dies*

Return of the king

There are two ways to do a sequel. The easy way involves giving people more of what they like, preferably as quickly as possible after the initial game is released. It's a safe and usually successful strategy.

It's also boring and leads, inevitably, to derivative, tedious experiences for all involved, from creators to consumers.

Nintendo has taken the hard way, releasing sequels only when technology or design has advanced enough to enable an entirely new game — not just a rehash. It has been six years since the last color *Zelda*, but only now is Nintendo readying its next iteration of the game, using the lessons learned from *Mario 64* and applying them to a very different style of gameplay.

It's a method that's almost sure to result in anything except the same-old, same-old, and more importantly, it may help attract a new audience to gaming. And therein lies the challenge for the industry as a whole: How do companies continue to expand video and computer games' appeal to the mass market while keeping the enthusiast audience entertained?

As you may have guessed, **Next Generation** has a few ideas about that, and we believe the signs are there and the stage is set for videogames to take over the world. How? The prescription begins on page 40.

NEXT GENERATION

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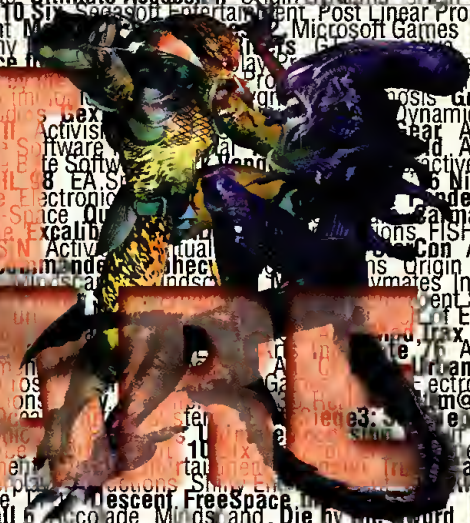

NEXT GENERATION

June 1998

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Welcome Simon, avoid the voles. Note to developers: We've got a cover for *Federal League Hockey '77* (featuring the Hanson Brothers). We've done our part, now you do yours. Develop the game already. The license is available. Call us for details. Free drinks in our booth! See you there.

10

A **force** to be **reckoned with**

As the president of LucasArts, Jack Sorensen has the rights to what is arguably the sweetest license in video and computer game history, working it into a string of (sometimes undeserved) PC hits. With new *Star Wars* movies looming in the very near future, **Next Generation** takes a moment to ask: Is this a license to print money, or what?

58

Cover: ***Zelda 64***

It took a while, but it's finally ready — and Nintendo means it this time. The scoop on Miyamoto's *other* masterpiece

40

The **future** of **games**

The videogame industry is growing faster than ever, but can it ever break into the mainstream? **Next Generation** thinks so

18

Intelligence

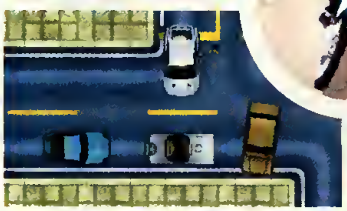
Sega's Bernie Stolar waxes eloquent on Katana • Microsoft's new gamepad • A new official high score book is released • Plus all the regular columns

57

Alphas: 25 new titles in the works

Get the scoop on *Zelda 64: Ocarina of Time*, *Spyro the Dragon*, *Slave Zero*, ESPN Digital Games, *Giants*, *Arokh*, FASA Interactive, and *Rogue Trip*; plus, a new feature: Milestones

134



Finals: 21 new games reviewed

Games reviewed this month run the gamut from some of the best we've seen to some of the worst it's been our misfortune to have to play; plus, the Gamer's Guide is back

10 talking

Jack Sorensen
The man who runs LucasArts takes a break from his many chores and speaks out on *Episode One*, *Myst*, and Sliiwood; and just how much does George know about games anyway?

18 analyzing

Intelligence
Gaming news and analysis, including:
23 **In the Studio** (breaking titles)
25 **Movers & Shakers** (business news)
30 **Retroview** (game history)
32 **Arcadia** (coin-op news and updates)

58 ng special

Zelda 64
OK, so it didn't turn out to be the launch product for the 64DD, and sure, it's been delayed — a lot — but *The Ocarina of Time* looks as if it's turned out to be worth the wait

40 ng special

How videogames will conquer the world
Can videogames break into the big time and compete directly with movies and TV for the attention of the mass audience?

57 ng software

Alphas
Get the latest on: *Spyro the Dragon* (PSX); *Slave Zero* (PC), *Giants* (PC); *Arokh* (PC); *Tomorrow Never Dies* (PSX/PC); FASA Interactive (PC); *Rogue Trip* (PSX); ESPN Digital Games (PSX/PC); *LAPD 2100* (PSX/PC); Plus: Milestones

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134 rating

Finals
Reviewed: *1080° Snowboarding* (N64), *Tekken 3* (PlayStation), *Die by the Sword* (PC); *Battlezone* (PC), *NFL Blitz* (Arcade); *Blasto* (PlayStation)

154 now hiring

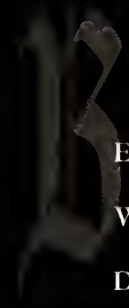
Follow your dreams. Answering one of these ads could land you a cool new job

159 corresponding

Letters
This month, a diatribe against scapegoating and a lesson in Spanish grammar

163 ending

Next month ...
Next Generation reveals the birth of EA's new sports franchise — boxing. **NG 43** hits June 23



BEHOLD, THE DAY OF THE LORD COMES, CRUEL, WITH WRATH AND FIERCE ANGER, TO MAKE THE EARTH A DESOLATION AND TO DESTROY ITS SINNERS FROM IT.

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The force is with them. No wise-crackin' teenage marsupials "with attitude" for them — instead they make games starring Han Solo and Darth Vader. And now, with *Episode One* of the new *Star Wars* trilogy looming, LucasArts' developers and Jack Sorensen face their destiny (kinda) as ...

A force to be reckoned with

LucasArts is one of the most consistently successful software houses in the business. A sign of genius? Or simply that — duh — it gets to make *Star Wars* games? There's no black or white answer to that one. But there are other questions. How much influence does George Lucas actually have? Is he a gamer? And how come LucasArts has never managed to bring its PC success to the consoles? **Next Generation** met with Jack Sorensen, president of LucasArts, at the company's headquarters in San Rafael, California.

Working with George Lucas

NG: What's the relationship between LucasArts and the rest of George Lucas' empire?

Jack: LucasArts is one of three Lucas companies: There's Lucasfilm, which primarily makes movies, Lucas Digital, which includes ILM [Industrial Light and Magic, responsible for the dinosaurs rts, which makes games. corporation. And it's all owned by Mr. Lucas.

NG: Do the three companies work closely together or are they independent?

Jack: Each division is autonomous in the sense that each division makes its own decisions and has its own board of directors — with George as chairman of the we me together for legal and tax issues, which is normal for all corporations. And, obviously, there is a lot interaction concerning the new movie, with all three companies talking on an almost daily basis — especially LucasArts and ILM. We haven't had to interact like this since the last *Indiana Jones* movie.

NG: So to what extent is each LucasArts game touched by the hand of George?

Jack: To a degree, yeah. I mean he obviously knows about them all. But one thing you have to understand is that although he's chairman of the board and the owner, for the last two years he's pretty much been acting only as a filmmaker. He's got his own job to do and he's very, very busy. The discussions that he may enter into about games are usually brought up by me with a view to getting some closure — either answers to questions, his stamp of approval, or his input on story or consistency issues. We also need to talk about scheduling — when he's going to be finished with stuff so we can get our hands on it.

NG: George Lucas is primarily a filmmaker. Does he understand games? Does he get that whole "interactive" thing?

Jack: You've got to remember that with *Star Wars*, George, in many ways, founded the idea of the big effects movie. So he's been dealing with how technology overlaps within a creative media product for a long time. Simply because movies don't involve a lot of programming code doesn't mean that he doesn't understand what we're doing conceptually.

NG:

Jack: No. But he gets lot his information about games — maybe too much information about games — from some of his friends who are hardcore gamers; people like

Steven Spielberg, Robin Williams, and others throughout the industry. So he's pretty plugged in.

NG: Having George Lucas as chairman, does he provide a creative vision that guides everything LucasArts does?
Jack: Only inadvertently, but — in my opinion — this is the best way. George is not a gamer, so he doesn't get involved with the nuts and bolts of producing a good game. And when you're building as many games as we are, this is just as well — you can't spread one person's creativity that thinly. Ask someone like Peter Molyneux and he will tell you that he can't oversee five or six projects simultaneously with the same detail to which he oversaw development of the original *Populous*.

Instead, what George provides through his own work is an example. And this example says a lot of things about being high quality, entertaining, technologically interesting, and appealing to as broad an audience as you possibly can. Because of this, LucasArts is probably more like ILM and Lucasfilm than we are like other game companies. And that is the impact of George being our founder.

Using the force

NG: Just how big a deal is it working with *Star Wars*?
Jack: I don't think it's tooting our own horn to say that *Star Wars* is unique. It's bizarrely unique. We don't really understand it. I don't think George necessarily understands it. But it's managed to survive, and it seems like it's going to continue. So the appeal of the *Star Wars* property and the fact that it's been "filled out" to such a degree — even before we started to make games around it — shows that it's somehow become more than a two-hour feature film and become, for lack of a better word, a world. So I see our work as being less about us doing *Star Wars* games and leveraging off the film as much as us being able to take this incredibly appealing world and then set games in it.

Most films go to a lot of effort of being contained or offer a very linear jumping off point for the sequel. They're not supposed to offer this open-ended alternate reality, this pebble in the pond that spreads out concentric circles, and yet this is what *Star Wars* is. And we've operated within that. I mean, look at *Titanic* — what are they going to do next, *Titanic 2*? *The Hindenberg*? That has all the ingredients — lots of bodies, burning lovers [smiles]. Look at the top films — not many of them create a world that can live on after the movie credits roll.

NG: Could LucasArts have got to where it is today without *Star Wars*? Because you know that every developer in the world looks at you guys with envy and thinks, "Man, now if we got the chance to do a *Star Wars* game . . ."
Jack: That's hard to say. Could we be where we are today without *Star Wars*? You have to look at where we were before we started doing *Star Wars* products, and at this time we were comparable to an Origin or a Westwood. We were pushing things a little bit, and if these guys have survived in one form or another, which they certainly have, then I think we would have survived too.

NG: Obviously you've enjoyed a lot of success with your various *Star Wars* games. But in what ways do you worry that you may have failed to realize their full potential?
Jack: We probably haven't been commercial enough. Why? Because we are too concerned about not only keeping the hardcore gaming audience happy, but frankly, keeping the hardcore *Star Wars* fans happy also — because this is who we are. We know *Star Wars* inside out. There is a level of detail that people know about, and we have to be consistent around this.

This causes problems because what the more general audience wants is more of the traditional *Star Wars* popularity items. They want more Death Star explosions, more trench runs, more Han Solo . But when delivering an experience like, say, *X-Wing* or *Jedi Knight*, we've had to distance ourselves from the main *Star Wars* stories that everyone's familiar with. And because you have to extrapolate so much to deliver cool gaming scenarios — without going over the same old ground — a lot of people find our games esoteric. The movies have drawn them in, and they think it's cool, but then they're disappointed because — even if it sounds absurd — they want to be, like, Han Solo killing off Darth Vader with a lightsaber. And this can't happen, obviously. It's not true to the *Star Wars* world.

How many more monster games are going to be interesting? If any at all? Even John Romero knows that the genre needs more to survive

NG: So working with *Star Wars* isn't automatically a golden ticket to easy success?
Jack: Well, I know it sounds goofy to say that it's a burden, but working with the *Star Wars* world doesn't automatically give you, as a game maker, everything that you think it might. There are a lot of restrictions, as well as a certain amount of liberty.

NG: So what have you tried to do with a *Star Wars* game that you haven't been allowed to do?
Jack: There are lots of details that I can't remember over time. Everything has to get vetted by a process within Lucas licensing, which is the keeper of the universe and

the book on *Star Wars* — we are just another licensee as far as this is concerned. But because we've been working the license so long and we're part of the family, we're able to get things across much better with them. And generally they'll let things slide.

But really we are far more limiting on ourselves than licensing would be. There were a number of games that have been proposed over the years, and we haven't even bothered sending them up to licensing.

NG: For example?

Jack: There have been many examples where people have wanted to extrapolate on the property or instances where, frankly, people have tried to make *Star Wars* too much of their own thing. People have wanted to design new characters or ships and put them in the universe, and we have to conclude that it's just not *Star Wars*.

What's really interesting right now regarding *Episode One* is that lots and lots of stuff was designed, but only a very small subset of the stuff will make it into the film. Most of it was rejected. We've had a good look at all the stuff that's approved — the stuff that will be in the new film — and all this stuff's been approved by George. And you know what? It's *Star Wars* — it fits. I even sat in on a couple of sessions where stuff was being approved, and George would be very particular about the details. So there's really a consistent vision as to what's *Star Wars* and what's not.

When delivering an experience like, say, *X-Wing* or *Jedi Knight*, we've had to distance ourselves from the main *Star Wars* stories everyone's familiar with

NG: How come you've never done a *Star Wars* adventure game?

Jack: That's a very good question. We've debated about it dozens of times over the years, but you know, I think this is the classic example of where *Star Wars* has its limits. We've come up with ideas over the years, we've even worked on some, but they've never come together. And I think the reason is that *Star Wars* is much more about, and I hate to say it, action and movement and energy. The contrast with something like *Indiana Jones* is pretty stark. You look at *Indy* and you think action, but at heart it's a classic narrative adventure. *Star Wars*, on the other hand, really at heart — and without getting too deep into it — is a spiritual adventure, and that's a difficult thing to get across in an adventure game. Look at the movie. Whenever you see puzzles getting solved in *Star Wars*, it's usually used as a very quick bridge into some either action or spiritual sequence. Our decision never to move forward with a *Star Wars* adventure game really comes down to the fact that things we've developed have never "felt" like *Star Wars* — they've seemed lame and have never been allowed to progress beyond infancy.

Turning stories into games

NG: In recent years LucasArts has focused on two types of games: *Star Wars*-based action games [such as *Jedi Knight*, *X-Wing*, and *Shadows of the Empire*] and point 'n' click graphic adventures [such as *Sam and Max Hit the Road*, *Full Throttle*, and *Grim Fandango*]. On first inspection, these two genres seem to have nothing in common. But both take a linear narrative, an existing story, or creative world, and turn them into an interactive experience. Is this just coincidence?

Jack: Well, the strong story narrative content is certainly something that's very much a part of LucasArts. Despite all of us being concerned about the game and whether or not it's fun to play, every project has to have something that pulls it together. And regardless of what people emphasize in terms of the gameplay being paramount, which is something I agree with, having simply a series of unrelated, cool gameplay elements ... Well, it's not our trademark, I guess you could say.

In the old days of gaming, with arcade titles like *Centipede* and whatever, you didn't need much story content. But now, especially on the PC, you don't see games like this anymore.

NG: *Doom* had no story.

Jack: I'm not knocking *Doom*. What *Doom* lives and breathes off of is great game mechanics. I'm not saying that games absolutely require a story, but it is something that is very much a part of the principle that we work by.

I don't believe that a story is contrary to gaming. I believe a story can add a little — or even a lot — of context and motivation to go on to the next level. Besides, simply relying on adrenaline and that notion of, "I just want to see what happens next!" is ultimately its own story. Even in *Mario*, when my four-year-old son plays *Mario*, he wants to save Princess Peach. He was collecting stars and stuff, but once we got onto the trail of rescuing Peach, this became his primary focus, and the stars didn't matter so much anymore. And this is a pretty thin storyline, and one that the *Mario* games have been working off of for the last 10 years.

How many more monster games are going to be interesting? If any at all? Even John Romero knows that the genre needs more to survive, and this is what he's trying to introduce with *Daikatana*.

NG: LucasArts has been blurring the line between stories

and games since the 1980s. This same marriage is, in essence, what companies such as Rocket Science tried to do in 1992 and 1993. Most of these companies that tried to merge Silicon Valley with Hollywood went bust. How come you've succeeded where others have failed?

Jack: It's very, very, very hard to build software. And I think there's a real value in tradition and history and precedents and being able to draw on expertise from one product to build another. And when you're just starting off you don't have this. Most of the money that went into companies such as Rocket Science didn't get the immediate return that the investors were hoping for, they then got out too quick, and many of the companies that didn't make it maybe could have made it if they had been given a little more time.

This notion that games and movies need to merge pisses me off to no end — it's demeaning to games. And that whole "Siliwood" thing pissed me off

By the time that all this started we were ten years old. And this is a lot of time to make mistakes — which we did, as did EA, we all had our development nightmares — and realize that you have to learn some lessons the hard way. There's no genius to it. But if you don't have a patient and understanding approach to the product development process then the odds are stacked against you. I would never put a team of any experts together and say, "Go for it" without some serious game people there. Because you know it's going to go wrong.

NG: But as games become more and more sophisticated, and computer technology enables better and better graphics, isn't the line between games and film destined to become more blurred?

Jack: Not necessarily. Look at music. Look at Celine Dion singing that god-awful song. Without its attachment to *Titanic* there's no way that song would have dominated the charts for 16 weeks. No way. But it happened, and even though it happened, it doesn't mean that the next album by Pearl Jam isn't going to go right to the top without a movie link.

This notion that games and movies need to merge pisses me off to no end — it's demeaning to games. And that whole "Siliwood" thing pissed me off simply because it looked like games needed to be saved, you know? Games are a totally normal, totally legitimate form of entertainment, and there will be crossovers and there will be noncrossovers. And that will continue. There are always going to be some cool movies that will work as a game, they'll work in spades, and people will look at these successes and say, "This is the way it should be done!" But then the next Merchant Ivory movie is not going to generate a great action game, even if it's a number one hit and wins best picture. I don't know why it has to be one or the other.

NG: So you don't think that games will increasingly steal more and more audiences away from the movies?

Jack: I read some statistics just the other week. Last year the game industry grew about 30% overall. Without *Titanic,* the film industry's box office would have declined — with *Titanic,* it grew about 5%. So something is happening here. But games are not going to replace movies by any means. Sometimes people are just going to want to sit back, relax, and watch a movie. They're not always going to want another frag fest with *Quake 2* because it requires effort, it's very demanding.

The future of games

NG: So how will games move forward?

Jack: The game business is going to continue growing, and I think what we need to do now is move away from relying on the hardcore audience but still have good, solid, quality game experiences that normal people can enjoy. This is happening already, and this is the future of the industry.

NG: And how will games of the future be different?

Jack: One of the statements that I made a long time ago is that what TV and films do is try and work off of empathy — they want you to feel through someone else. What games have a chance of doing is cutting out the middleman, of making the player feel something himself. Now maybe right now they are too crude or too complicated or simply too conceptually off-putting, but increasingly products will pull this off, and more and more people will get it.

NG: And what do you see as the breakthrough game that gets everyone playing?

Jack: Products that will cross over the most, that in the long term will be our future? If I knew, we'd be making them [smiles]. But they will be products that offer participatory experiences exclusive to interactive. It can't offer feelings or emotion "just like the movies" or some kind of marking of a period of time in people's lives the way a record can. It won't be re-creating another art form but offering something new and unique. It will need an emotional pull or a nostalgic pull that will make people go, "Nothing else has made me feel this!" And you know what? For a lot of people *Myst* did this.

NG: Did *Myst*'s success surprise you?

Jack: Everyone knows all about *Myst* and everyone's mystification about it within the industry.

We've been doing adventure games since 1985 and

1986, it wasn't as if we saw the success of *Myst* and said, "Wow, you know what? We've gotta start doing adventure games!"

NG: No, but its success must have pissed you off a little ...
Jack: It pissed the entire industry off. Because when we first saw it, it just seemed so bizarre — an adventure game without animation, a real retro concept. And then, what I found so strange was that the interface was simple but the game wasn't. It had a lot of the genre's worst elements. I mean, we know a lot about adventure games, and there's a lot of things in adventure gaming that I really hate, and *Myst* had almost all of them: it was difficult, it was illogical. Sure it was pretty, but then a lot of games are pretty.

NG: So why did it do so well?
Jack: Because *Myst* didn't sell to the normal gaming public. And I think when you look at the gaming industry over the last few years, you see the success of Mattel, Lego, and Hasbro, and you realize that there are a lot of people out there with PCs who want an experience different from the ones that all of the specialist game magazines are talking about.

NG: And different audiences demand different games?
Jack: To me, saying, "I hate *Myst*" is like saying, "I really hate watching 'Home Improvement' on TV" — to which the answer is, "So don't watch it."

The whole *Myst* phenomena really makes no difference to what we're doing, it doesn't change anything. What Mattel, Lego, and Hasbro have done is simply convert some of their toy market share into the interactive. It couldn't be more logical. A lot of kids have finally gotten their hand-me-down PCs over which they have control, and it's logical that the toy brands — who have experience pitching to kids — should take this market.

What I've always said about LucasArts is that we're kind of a luxury car — we can't suddenly say that we're making tricycles. We don't know how to do it. We don't know how to bring down our level of engineering to that. Not that we don't have the skill set, but we don't have the culture.

NG: Is this why your console games have never been as good as your PC games?
Jack: This is one of the things that bothers us the most — and we're not giving up. We came out of the PC business, and that's been our strength and a hardcore part of our culture. But we keep having more and more tries at the consoles, and sooner or later we're going to hit and people are going to be surprised and say, "Shit!"

But again, it just goes to show that you can't enter this business lightly — it takes a lot of expertise. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a lot of people lost a lot of money with coin-op. It nearly brought down MicroProse, and EA lost a bunch.

And it's the same with every new format and with every new format shift with consoles — there were an awful lot of big 8-bit players who aren't around now. A lot of people didn't make the leap from 16-bit to 32-bit very well. The console business is tough like this. The PC business, by being a little more iterative, allows you to draw on one skill set and pile it on another and eventually grow the number of genres you cover and your quality of product. On consoles, sadly, it's a little more slash and burn — even though a lot of the assembly language, that mad hacker ethos, has gone.

NG: So, *Episode One* — the first of the prequels. Due out in 1999. Go on, spill the beans ...
Jack: [Sarcastic] You know, we're actually going to build a game based on the new movie ...

NG: You heard it here first!
Jack: We think, you know, that this might be a good idea [laughs].

No, obviously this is a big thing for us. It's been on my schedule for a long time, we've talked over ideas with George, and we hope to have something pretty cool out when the movie launches.

NG: When putting together ideas for the movie, did George listen to you when you said, "You know, George, from the game's point of view it would be easier if ..."
Jack: George doesn't listen to anyone. I mean this is a big business for our organization, and there are a lot of people on the board who want him to consider all the latest marketing and demographic information. But he's not going to cast the most popular teenage heartthrob or rewrite the story so it's set on some doomed ocean liner [laughs]. There are people who look at what he's making and are shaking their heads saying, "How are we going to make this into a toy?" But George doesn't care. He's just making the movie he wants to make.

I tell him all the time, "I don't know what we can do with this" and he says, "Oh well ..." He's going to make his movie. The rest of us are just going to have to figure it out ...

Star Wars is unique. It's bizarrely unique. We don't really understand it. I don't think George [Lucas] necessarily understands it. But it's managed to survive

TEAM UP &

"don't outrun me Sulky we got a date with the endzone"

Thorn

commando Thorn sees
his chance to be a hero

"shake your boots commandos I need cover fire here"

Sulky

heading upfield ball in hand
Sulky realizes she's target #1

4 games in all
multiple arenas 10 minute matches fast & fierce
many ways to play one way to win: teamwork

Capture the Flag

the name says it: capture and hold as
many flags as you can for as long as you can

BaseTag

score points by destroying enemy
base stations while defending your own

Team Deathmatch

hunt the other team to rack up kills,
then protect weakened teammates
or you'll be overrun

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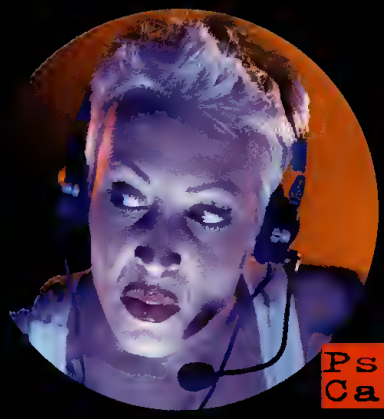
TALK IT UP



"I'll drop a combat drone to cover our flank"

Psycho Cat

her last kill forced a fumble now
PsychoCat's about to draw fire

"pound it up the right side you guys I'm just about wasted"

MadMac

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MadMac takes heat for the team

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FIRE TEAM

Katana takes shape: And Sega's Bernie Stolar is ready • **Game Boy gets the picture:** The venerable handheld gets a new lease on life with new peripherals • **Then and now:** Tod Frye, designer/programmer of the Atari 2600 *Pac-Man*, speaks • **Microsoft's new Sidewinder pad:** A new controller that puts gravity in the palm of your hand

intelligence

The news you have to know

Sega lays down gauntlet

As Katana plans solidify, Sega's Bernie Stolar offers tough talk

In a recent conversation with **Next Generation**, Sega of America President and Chief Operating Officer Bernie Stolar offered key details about Sega's new machine — and the company's prelaunch mind-set.

In 1994, on the eve of the Saturn's launch, Sega of Japan's then-president Hayoa Nakayama said, "Sometimes we will win, and sometimes others will win. For certain we will survive, whether as number one or number two, I don't know." Little did Nakayama realize then that in the U.S., the answer would be third, and a distant third at that.

Today, as Sega approaches its most important launch yet, Bernie Stolar's vision is about more than survival. Written on the whiteboard in his office is his mandate for the future: "Vengeance will be mine/It's about winning." The statement is a clear reference to those who questioned his sanity after he defected from Sony, where he started the incredibly successful third-party division, and a refreshing change from the conservatism that has plagued videogames' upper management of late. **Next Generation** spoke with him at Sega of America's Redwood City, California, headquarters

NG: Is Katana going to be the final product name?
Bernie: No, it will not be the final name.

NG: What will it be?
Bernie: Katana will not be the final name [laughs].

You know, Sony is a big company; they have a lot of muscle, a lot of horsepower, and sometimes you can get a big head

NG: Katana, or "the system presently known as Katana," anyway, is currently scheduled to launch ...
Bernie: In the Autumn of 1999. Japan is going to launch toward the end of this year. In Europe we'll launch sometime after we launch here.

NG: So, through the rest of '98 and the beginning of '99, what is Sega's top priority? Readjusting attitudes after the disastrous 32-bit race? Getting rid of Saturn inventory?
Bernie: It's not getting rid of it. We're going to manage this transition because we in no way want to do a disservice to our consumers. [Saturn] consumers have been with us for a long time, and we plan on keeping them for a long time. We're going to continue advertising the different new software that will be coming out. We'll have product flow through this year of software. We're going to release *Burning Rangers*, *House of the Dead*, *Shinning Force II*. We'll be running print ads for those products to continue driving Saturn. You'll see us maintaining and driving the Sega brand this year. We'll be doing that with our PC titles, with online, with SegaSoft, and with Sega PC games.

As for attitudes, Sega believes in winning as a company. Everyone working for the company today has that look in their eye. Sega will be the number one platform going into the next generation systems. We will capture, I believe, because of our software and our marketing, better than 50% of the market share of those systems going into the future. And that's creating real excitement within the company. We're going to have all the things that you need to put in front of the consumer to make the consumer come to you and make you the number one player. Going into the next launch, we will have full distribution, we will have third-party support, we'll have terrific software at the launch, we'll have a very competitive price point, and we'll have strong marketing. And we will spend the marketing dollars that it takes and make this successful.

NG: OK, let's go through this one by one. First, what kind of marketing dollars will we see?
Bernie: I've been quoted as saying that we will spend $100 million dollars on the marketing effort to launch Katana. And that is by far the most this company has ever spent on a launch. We are really going to do this right. We are getting the right people in place and the right teams, and by next fall, you will be hearing about [Katana] everywhere — *Time*, *Newsweek* — as the hot system to get. And that $100 million is just through Christmas 1999.

NG: You mention third-party support. Obviously that was one of Saturn's biggest weaknesses. At Sony, you were in charge of third-party relations. How has it been getting third parties to look at Katana?
Bernie: It's really great working with your friends; it's much easier [laughs]. I think we're going to have great third-party support, I think you'll see every major third party working with us. They're excited about the technology. Yeah, I was instrumental in creating that at Sony, and you can rest assured that it's not just me that came over here from Sony. Our third-party department is real strong. You can ask any third-party group, and we're pretty well-respected right now.

NG: Is the fear of Sony dominating the market also helping with the third parties?
Bernie: You know, Sony is a big company; they have a lot of muscle, a lot of horsepower, and sometimes you can get a big head. Like in a basketball game — you go out onto the court and you think that your opponent isn't as strong as they really are. And so you lose sight of what's really taking place. I think Sony may be doing that.

NG: How worried are you about PlayStation 2, assuming it launches in 1999?
Bernie: I don't think PlayStation 2 will launch in 1999. I could be wrong, but I don't see that. I think instead that in 1999, they'll be on the downward cycle. Sony has never experienced that. I think that they are going to find that really different than when you're going up. You have to manage it differently. Also, they're not going to have a lot of new, fresh titles. They'll probably have something new from Square, but a lot of it will be remakes; it'll be the *Crash 3*s, *XYZ 5*s. There's not going to be a lot of freshness. We're going to bring a lot of freshness with much better graphics, much better audio. The speed will be much faster. There's going to be a sense of newness with Katana, and I think people will look at PlayStation as being a little tired. In that sense I think we'll be very successful.

NG: What about Nintendo?
Bernie: Hey, Nintendo has a lot of money. They're there, they're a competitor. I'm not worried about them, but I know that they're going to be out there. They're going to continue to drive forward, and that's what makes the world kind of interesting.

NG: The retail situation for Saturn was a bit tricky, to put it mildly. How long are retailers' memories?
Bernie: Retailers want to make money. They also don't want to see Sony as the only platform. They are very, very, very supportive of us on that. I couldn't ask for a better reception than we've been getting.

NG: There've been concerns that development kits have been slow getting out, that kits have been recalled ...
Bernie: Development is definitely underway. Development is happening right now on a global ➤

Who is it?

This producer is best known for his work on *Manx TT*, *Virtual On*, and *Top Skater* for Sega's R&D team AM3.

Game Boy gets the gift of sight

Nintendo's handheld shows its colors with a new line of hardware accessories

Considering the fact that it's a nine-year-old system, it's somewhat impressive that Game Boy is still making headlines. This time it's with the Pocket Camera, which will release this month at an SRP of $49.95. This device, which attaches to the cartridge port of the Game Boy, enables users to take up to 30 pictures, manipulate them as animation, or print them onto stickers with Nintendo's Pocket Printer ($59.95). Users can even place their digitized faces in specialized games.

The Pocket Camera's most immediate appeal will be to the preteen market, which is already enamored with the coin-op sticker machines located in malls. In just a matter of seconds, kids can plug in the camera and printer and get to work. With some effort, they can even edit their frames into a small movie, as well as cue sound effects. The image quality is surprisingly good considering it only has four shades of gray and a low resolution. But because of its low resolution, its 30-image capacity should only take up about 100K of uncompressed RAM, which, according to the current Game Boy spec, must be compressed to 32K.

This is yet another of nine lives for the black-and-white system, which moves into the world of color later this year. But competition may exist just over the horizon, thanks to the acquisition of Tiger and Atari Home Division by Hasbro. A new pocket version of Game.com will be released with a slew of new titles, including *Resident Evil 2*. Also keep in mind that Hasbro is the proud new owner of the Atari Home Division game rights. Even so, it seems highly unlikely that Game.com can present too great a challenge for the market-dominating Game Boy.

Game Boy's new Pocket Camera peripheral will never threaten to replace the Nikon, but the ability to take tiny black-and-white shots and print them on stamps has proven popular in Japan

➤ basis. When you send out development tools, you send them out and you continually upgrade those as you move forward. So, no one is sending them back, I can tell you that. But we are upgrading them as each month goes along because we're continually moving the technology, and as we do that, we give out more and more information. What we're doing is giving them better libraries and better tools. So that's what's taking place right now. That happens with every type of development system at any time.

NG: How many launch titles will Katana have?
Bernie: Well, one, we're looking for quality, not quantity, so I'd say anywhere from 10 to 12 titles at launch. Talking about the launch period, by the end of December 1999, I think somewhere between 20 and 30 titles. For me that's a great library because the focus will be quality, not quantity.

NG: Saturn launched at $399. Clearly that was too high. What's too high for Katana?
Bernie: $399 [smiles]. $299 is too high, too. We're going to be very competitive. I'll leave it at that.

NG: Some of Saturn's biggest critics were the people in the AM divisions at Sega. Yu Suzuki, in particular, was outspoken about his disappointment with the machine. Are arcade producers ever going to be satisfied with the limitations of a home machine?
Bernie: It's very different this time. Yu Suzuki is developing a product for Katana first, which is really unusual because usually AM2 develops first for the arcade and then the console. The title he's working on, well, I view it as one of the most exciting titles that I've seen since I've been in this business.

NG: How important will arcade conversions be for Katana?
Bernie: Saturn, I think, everybody viewed as an arcade game machine. That's not what Katana is. Katana is going to be a platform that's going to give you a variety of products covering all the popular genres. We are leveraging more than just our arcade heritage with the platform.

NG: So will Katana do any of the things that consoles can do but traditionally haven't done well, like multimedia, online, or edutainment?
Bernie: First and foremost, we're going to sell this as the ultimate game machine. That's the mandate. We will have online technology for the system. And I'm a big believer in education, and I think down the road, we're looking at different models for the system of how to add value, but that's down the road. First we want to make sure we have the installed base as the number one game system.

NG: You're going to have a huge marketing budget. Is that enough to

He is ...

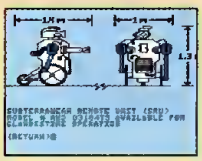
Hisao Oguchi. He joined Sega in 1984, where he would produce *Heavyweight Champ* and *Super Monaco GP*.

Yu Suzuki is developing a product for Katana first, which is really unusual because usually AM2 develops first for the arcade and then the console

Haven't we met before?

When Oscar Wilde wrote, "Talent borrows, but genius steals," he could easily have been referring to videogame design. Although many ideas currently circulating around the industry look totally original, there is often an 8-bit skeleton waiting in the closet to take all the true credit. Here are a few contemporary titles, and beneath, their possible inspirations ...

X-Files Unrestricted Access
(Fox Interactive, 1998)
The player enters a mysterious world of conspiracy and espionage via a deliberately obscure interface. The aim is to hack into secret files and set up surveillance cameras to learn more about Mulder and Scully.



Hacker
(Activision, 1985)
The player enters a mysterious world of conspiracy and espionage via a deliberately obscure interface. The aim is to hack into secret files and set up surveillance cameras to learn more about a mysterious multinational company.

Silicon Valley
(DMA, 1998)
Take control of a robot as it transports aboard a spacecraft, then destroys the inhabitants by taking them over and acquiring their individual characteristics. A *Mario 64*-style 3D environment.

Paradroid
(Hewson, 1985)
Take control of a robot as it transports aboard a spacecraft, then destroys the inhabitants by taking them over and acquiring their individual characteristics. Smooth C64 top-down scrolling.

be number one? Traditionally, the runaway winner in each generation manages to create a real cachet. Genesis made Super NES look like a toy, PlayStation made Saturn look stodgy. What will Katana make its competitors look like? Can you create the "cool" factor with $100 million, or do you need something more?

Bernie: It's the games, always in the games. Marketingwise, yeah, we're spending $100 million, and you know, a lot of that is not just the TV; there're so many different ways to market as opposed to the old traditional ways of just going on TV. We will be very heavy in TV, and we'll be in the stores with some really fantastic stuff. But a lot of it is how we'll look in print and how we're going to look in the way we do our promotions, the way we handle our PR. You're going to see us everywhere. We're going to have great promotional partners. I can't go into all those right now because of competitive situations. You will see us on the college campuses, you'll see us in the schools, you'll see us online. So we're going to take advantage of all the new technologies that are available to us to promote and market this system. But most importantly, the software will be compelling, and it's the software that really brings the cool factor. It's the software that brings the consumer in. Word-of-mouth will be so strong. Our GPU, what we're putting in our graphics processing, is unbelievable! It's never been seen before. But even if PlayStation 2 came out earlier, and even if it was an equal machine, we'd be stronger because of our software. Remember, we are the leading software company in the world, and that is what will be the distinctive difference. That's the differentiation factor between us and anybody else.

NG: You went through a console launch with Sony — one of the most successful of all time. How will the Katana launch compare?

Bernie: Yeah, I've gone through a launch once before, and I will tell you that from the blueprint and the architecture that we're using here, I think that this will be one of the biggest launches in the history of this business. And that's because the assets that Sega has from the software side are greater than anybody else in the industry as far as delivering quality software, and I think that's what's going to drive this. So that's where we're headed. Let me just end this by saying that I can tell you we will win in the position game, we will take better than 50% market share, and we will have the best [outright] software in the market. ng

Then and now

Catching up with 2600 *Pac-Man*'s Tod Frye

Then:

He was hired by Atari to create a handheld version of *Breakout*. When that project failed to ship (hardware costs for the 32x32 pixel LCD display were too high), Frye went into software development on the 2600. His first project? The much-demonized 2600 port of *Pac-Man*. Although the game has been slammed many times in the past (most recently in "The game industry's greatest failures," **NG 40**), Frye was proud of the accomplishment: "The capabilities of the 2600 were minimal, and *Pac-Man* was among the last of the 4K carts developed." According to Frye, his original version of *Pac-Man* featured nearly flicker-free ghosts. Why then did the final version look so bad? The program was too large to fit within the 4K cart. The flicker-free display drivers he designed for the first version of *Pac-Man* (which were not included in the game) were utilized by later teams working on 8K carts. After *Pac-Man*, Frye concentrated on "writing tweaky display drivers for other programmers to add game code to."

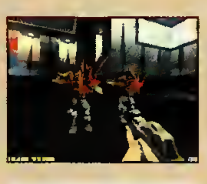
Now:

Frye has been programming for PlayStation for the past few years. Ironically, some of that work was done at Digital Eclipse, working on emulating games that were in development when he was working on 2600 software. Today, says Frye, "I am working at Konami — KCEA in Redwood Shores — on a top-secret, original title. Well, not really top secret, but the usual nondisclosure applies. Things are very much different these days, as the whole thing is collaborative! Design, programming, artwork, audio — every aspect of game development *requires* teamwork. I am very excited by the potential of the hardware and the possibilities for fun gameplay! However, as usual, the sheer complexity of the intrateam communication and limitations imposed by scheduling requests adds an amusing overlay of difficulty."

Like many veterans of the 2600 era, he has a few stories to tell. For more from Tod, see this month's letters. ng

Bust-A-Move
(Enix, 1998)
Watch a series of groovy characters perform well-choreographed dance moves, then try to replicate the sequence in time to the music.

Creatures
(CyberLife, 1997)
Communicate with artificially intelligent onscreen creatures via a sophisticated interface, and marvel as they slowly learn to respond to your commands.



Quake 2
(id, 1997)
Explore an extensive series of beautifully constructed complexes, battling with various imaginative creatures that duck and dive to avoid fire.

BreakDance
(Epyx, 1984)
Watch a poorly animated, barely recognizable figure jerk through a laughable collection of breakdance moves, then try to replicate them with no concern for the tuneless dirge playing in the background.

Little Computer People
(Activision, 1985)
Communicate with a ridiculous little onscreen man via a series of short phrases, and marvel as he completely ignores everything you ask him to do.

30 Monster Maze
(JK Greye Software, 1981)
Explore a monochrome 1K dungeon inhabited by impossibly blocky creatures. Which don't move at all.

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This month in **videogame history**

June 1, 1982	Coleco Industries announces its third generation of game systems, the ColecoVision. The revolutionary system boasts 32 sprites, 256x192 resolution, and up to 32K carts. It will retail for $199.99.
June 2, 1994	Saturn premieres at the Tokyo Toy Show.
June 7, 1997	Senator Lauch Faircloth (Rep., North Carolina) proposes legislation that would restrict federal employees from having any games on their PCs.
June 9, 1992	A group of investors led by Hiroshi Yamauchi of Nintendo Corporation purchases the Seattle Mariners baseball club for $125 million.
June 12, 1977	Infocom's seminal text adventure *Zork* is released. Among other firsts, it was the earliest example of a prepackaged software game for PC that was marketed by a group other than the developers.
June 13, 1981	David Jannise, 19, plays a game of *Asteroids* that lasts for 36 hours 29 minutes at Rainbow Roller Rink in Beaumont, Texas.
June 14, 1997	Figures published by *Dengeki-Oh*, a prominent Japanese magazine, show that Game Boy is outselling Nintendo 64 in Japan.
June 15, 1990	Namco, Ltd. announces that it has ended its five-year relationship with Atari Games (the coin-op division).
June 17, 1997	*Turok*, an American-produced game, debuts as the number one Nintendo 64 game in Japan — a rare event indeed.
June 20, 1994	Jay Miner, 62, passes away in Mountain View, California. The father of the Amiga computer, Miner oversaw the design of the Atari 2600 and the Atari 400/800 computers.
June 23-June 25, 1994	The Summer Consumer Electronics Show (CES) is held in Chicago, Illinois. Nintendo shows "Project Reality" behind closed doors, Sega demos the 32X in the basement, and Nintendo's *Donkey Kong Country* for Super NES steals the show.

Sources: **Next Generation Online** and Don Thomas' I C. When (http://www.l4software.com/icwhen)

In the **Studio**

The show may be gone, but Beavis and Butt-head are bringing more stupidity to the PlayStation and PC later this year. The Illusions Gaming Company is working on a graphic adventure game starring the delinquent duo for the PC. Illusions' past graphic adventures include *Duckman* and *Blazing Dragons*. The PlayStation version is being developed by New Level Software and will feature more action-intensive gameplay. Both games will be published by GT Interactive.

3DO may be out of the hardware business, but there's more than enough software in development to keep the company busy. The company is working on *Army Men 3D*, a third-person action game for PlayStation that puts players in control of a weapon-toting plastic soldier. Also, an unnamed tank game is in development for Nintendo 64, reminiscent of Namco's *Tokyo Wars* arcade game. While the company has other unannounced console titles in the works, it should release these two games this fall.

Peter Molyneux may have left Bullfrog, but that hasn't kept the company from making a sequel to his last published game. *Dungeon Keeper 2* is deep in development, and an early version of the game should be playable at the E3 trade show.

From Software, maker of the *King's Field* series and *Armored Core*, has announced a brand new PlayStation adventure title, *Echo Night*. Due out in Japan this July, this realtime game casts the player as a passenger trying to get off a shipwrecked ocean liner.

In Activision news, the company has signed a deal to publish the first three titles from Nihilistic Software. Credits of principal Nihilistic employees include *Dark Forces*, *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight*, *Descent*, *Descent II*, and the *Quake Mission Pack #2: Dissolution of Eternity*. Under the terms of the agreement, the first title from Nihilistic will be a 3D role-playing game, which Activision expects to release in Fall 1999. The coup further secures Activision's place among the premier publishers of PC games.

And in an effort to boost the company's languishing PlayStation product line, Activision has picked up the U.S. publishing rights to *Tenchu*. This ninja adventure game from Japan's Sony Music Entertainment provides players with numerous weapons with which to practice stealthy combat. The game has already sold more than 250,000 copies in Japan.

Microsoft

OUTWARS MEMORIAL (ITEM No. 328)

JET PACK

c.2389

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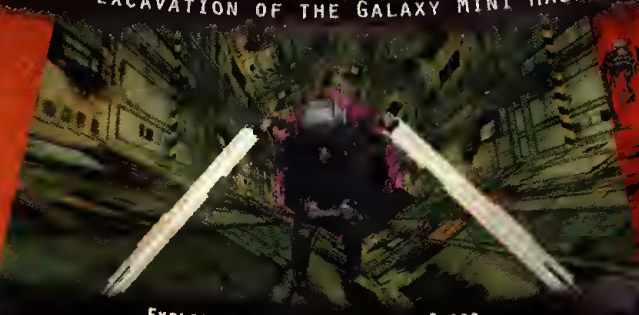

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Movers and Shakers

by **Colin Campbell**, **Next Generation**'s international correspondent

Cap'n, the Katana, she canna take anymore ...

This month I decided to crib from columnists in other videogame magazines. They have all been offering Sega much-needed advice on how to make Katana a success, and let me tell you, it makes for sensational reading. I urge Sega's management to spend more time imbibing the wisdom of videogame journalists. Truly, we are the heirs of Cicero.

The brain-imploding conclusions they draw, each and every one, is that Sega should make good products and sell them as cheaply as possible.

Did you get all that, Bernie?

Stolar and his cronies must count the agonizing hours between the arrival of *Great Games Monthly* or *Awesome Interactive World*. How their eyes must water at the sheer ecstasy of every profound new revelation.

Bernie surely reads these missives as if each were Plato's *Republic* before delivering them simply and eruditely to chieftains in Tokyo. "Mr. Irimajiri. Sir, I give you our bold new strategy. We shall produce good products and sell them at competitive prices."

Phew, five paragraphs of cheap sarcasm. I'm sure we're all pretty exhausted after that. But hey, this is E3 time. After three days of grandstand insincerity in the bowels of Atlanta, sarcasm gets to feel as good as ... as good as one of those really great and noble emotions you read about in old books.

Anyway, the columnists have managed a paradox. Not only have they hit upon a blinding truism, but they are also getting it all wrong. Here's why. Each argument is a carefully constructed critique of Sega's performance with Saturn. And each is based on the theory that if all the tediously documented mistakes of Saturn can be avoided, Katana will succeed.

Whatever gods exist to aid ailing hardware manufacturers should get off their asses and get to work. Sega needs divine intervention

But fighting old battles is precisely the strategy that will finally send Sega to hardware hell. What Sega needs is management that is smart enough to figure out that the videogame industry in 1999 looks a whole lot different from those sweet buttercup days of 1996. And you don't have to be too smart to get that far.

The real trick is to know where the differences lie. This time, Sony is an established force, not a pretender. Nintendo is on a roll, not languishing between technology generations. Consumers are spoiled with great games and are (mostly) readily able to identify crap at a remarkable distance.

Hell, Saturn was easy, and Sega still got it wrong. What has the company got this time?

Great marketing? Good products? Cheap prices? Yeah, yeah. But it's not enough. Sega has to produce something, anything that will shut the likes of me up once and for all. Like what, you ask? If I knew what it was, buddy, I wouldn't be sitting here doing this.

Whatever gods exist to aid ailing hardware manufacturers should get up off their asses and go to work. Sega needs divine intervention. Not butt-headed commentary.

The people from Planet Yes

Speaking of imaginary meetings, what is the least likely thing ever to have been said in a videogame industry meeting? My feeling is that it must have taken place in a powwow between execs at Sony Computer Entertainment Interactive in Japan and visitors from its U.S. subsidiary. The least likely thing to have been uttered in such a scenario by a U.S. exec is anything other than the words "yes" and "sir." Your alternative suggestions are welcome.

By rights the locals should have delivered unto Nintendo what English football hooligans call a "good shoeing"

Give unto Lincoln

Talking about Rome, Nintendo recently rolled into town to tell its European partners that it has decided to recognize the existence of this strange and dark continent. Nintendo execs humored the local savages with tales of large presences at one of their annual festivals (curiously named EEseetee-ess, a hitherto bacchanalian orgy of PlayStation worship).

So beloved is Nintendo by the Euros that Rome hasn't seen so much pathetic butt-kissing since Nero decided it was time to play "Torch the Ungrateful Eunuch."

By rights the locals should have delivered unto Nintendo what English football hooligans call "a good shoeing." Given Nintendo's apparent disdain for Europe — a place where Nintendo sells stuff without even trying — Howard Lincoln should have been sent off with a frankfurter in his ear.

In fact, Lincoln was received rapturously for finally bringing the message from Japan that Nintendo will invest in what is potentially the largest videogame market in the world.

All this impacts U.S. gamers very little. Except when you consider the absolutely abysmal offerings from European third-party developers on Nintendo 64. Let's be clear on this: Rare is based in the corner of a country barn in England, made up exclusively of warm-beer-swilling local talent. Could it be that a bit more support to the third parties from Nintendo might have yielded something more like *Diddy Kong Racing* and less like yet another so-so *Formula One* game?

Annual E3 rant

Finally, if you're not in the industry and thus you don't have to go to E3 this month, here's my annual cheap shot of populist rhetoric. It is plain wrong that so much money is spent showing games to people like me who have already seen them or who are teched up enough to quickly download movies of them from the Internet. Wouldn't it make more sense to show the games to the people who might actually buy them? For example, how many free demos could be bought for the price of yet another lame party in Atlanta? OK, I'm done now.

Message to industry readers: I didn't really mean that about the parties being lame.

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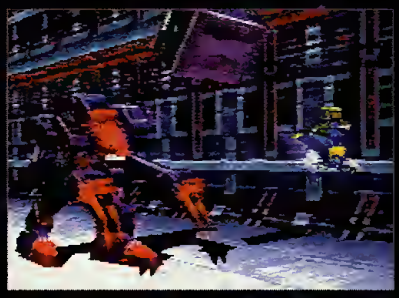
MASS DESTRUCTION, ANYONE?

ACTUALLY, THIS IS DESTRUCTION

FOR THE SHOOTER CONNOISSEUR.



TAKE A FLIGHT THROUGH A SURREAL

METROPOLIS, DEEP CAVERNS AND

THE COLD VACUUM OF OUTER

SPACE. BLOW STUFF UP. BLOW

IT'S YOUR TYPICAL SHOOTER. KIND OF.

EINHÄNDER

EVERYTHING UP. AND THEN PILLAGE

THE REMAINS OF YOUR CHARBROILED

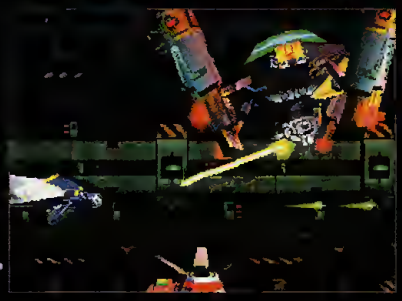
ENEMIES. BECAUSE YOU'RE GONNA

NEED THAT FIREPOWER (AND SOME

CEREBRAL AGILITY) TO KEEP ALL THOSE

MONSTROUS END BOSSES FROM

TURNING YOU INTO SPACE GARBAGE.



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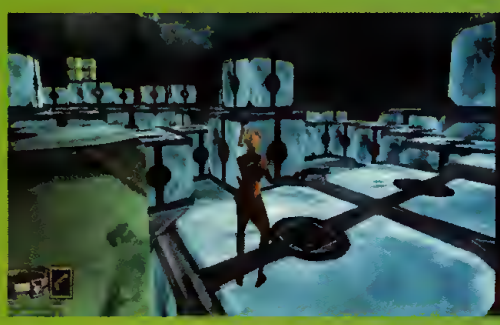

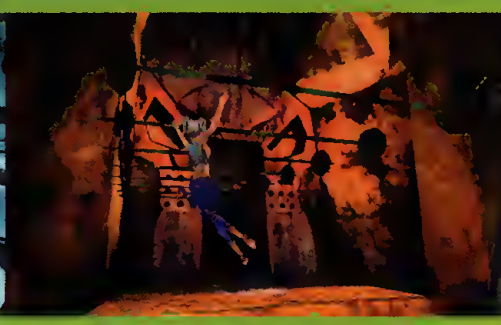

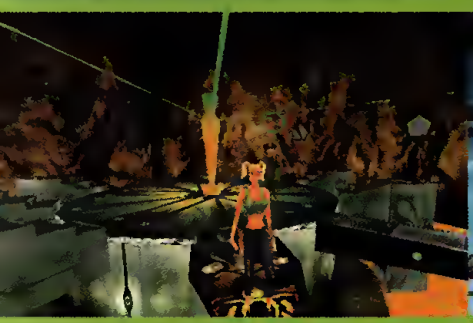

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www.ripcordgames.com

Microsoft unveils next generation game controller

Unless you plan on playing games on the moon, gravity-based gamepads are a solid concept

Microsoft continues to revolutionize gamepad technology with its latest design, the Sidewinder Freestyle Pro.

Similar look, but what a different feel. Microsoft's new Sidewinder runs on gravity

Visually comparable to the Sidewinder Gamepad, its most unique feature is the ability to switch to a gravity-based mechanism, enabling players to tilt the entire pad in any direction to produce an analog signal.

Similar gravity-based controllers have been produced as far back as Atari 2600, but Microsoft's effort is by far the best implementation of this technology to date. The controller is very ergonomic, with 10 programmable buttons, a rudder control, and a mode switch. Initial tests with a number of current titles made it clear that it plays best with games that require only loose control, like racing titles and flight sims. It's also mildly novel in that many games can now be played with one hand, since the need to use the directional pad has been eliminated. However, it's much less useful for games like *Tomb Raider II* and *Quake 2*, which require more precise handling.

Microsoft's latest adds to the current excitement in the PC hardware market. While **Next Generation** only saw a prototype of the Sidewinder Freestyle Pro, our overall initial impression is that it adds a unique feel to some games, but it won't ever replace a good, standard pad.

It's become a cliche to say of game cut scenes, "We'd rather just watch a movie." Now, Chris Roberts of *Wing Commander* fame is doing just that, with *Wing Commander: The Movie*. Given the modest $27 million budget and the two production stills we've seen, we get the distinct impression it's going to look more like a 90-minute cut scene for a PC game (poorly done 3D models and all) rather than a blockbuster Hollywood production, but we give full credit to Roberts and Digital Anvil for giving it a try.

Retroview

by **Steven Kent**, author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames

Lucky break

Eugene Jarvis, co-creator of *Defender*, *Stargate*, *Narc*, *Cruis'n USA*, and *Cruis'n World*, began his career in 1977 designing double-wide pinball machines for Atari's short-lived pinball division. He moved to Chicago in 1980 to work for Williams, where he designed *Defender*. Encouraged by the overwhelming success of his game, he and fellow designer Larry DeMar decided to go out on their own as independent developers. They founded a company called Vid Kidz in 1981, where their first project *Stargate* was a runaway hit. (Both returned to Williams when Vid Kidz went bust in 1983.)

Shortly after completing *Stargate*, Jarvis wrecked his MGB sports car, breaking his right hand. With his hand in a cast, Jarvis began work with DeMar on a futuristic game that would combine the theme of George Orwell's classic *1984* with one of Jarvis' favorite games, *Berzerk*.

I was thinking about the novel 1984. *There was a lot of excitement about the whole Orwell thing, and [the year] 1984 was upon us, and I was noticing that things were not at all like they were in the book.*

I'm kind of a science fiction guy, and I... decided that probably not too much was going to happen in the next couple of years. It was really going to be 2084 when the ship runs out, and it's not going to be humans subjugating humans, it's going to be robots doing the subjugating.

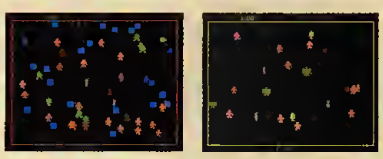
— Eugene Jarvis

Jarvis and DeMar set their game in the year 2084, giving mankind an extra century to create a new Big Brother, a race of benevolent robots that had evolved enough to not need humans.

So, computers are running around trying to help our lives by scooping up our shit and everything, and finally they realize, "What do we need these guys for? I mean, they're nasty people, they build nuclear bombs, and they kill each other."

— Eugene Jarvis

Jarvis prided himself on creating games with nearly insurmountable circumstances, and *Robotron 2084* was no exception. Players controlled a tiny hero with a large head and thick glasses, whom Jarvis described as, "Elton John on crack." The hero was surrounded by enemies.



Jarvis still plays *Robotron* every day. Like us, he plays only on difficulty "10"

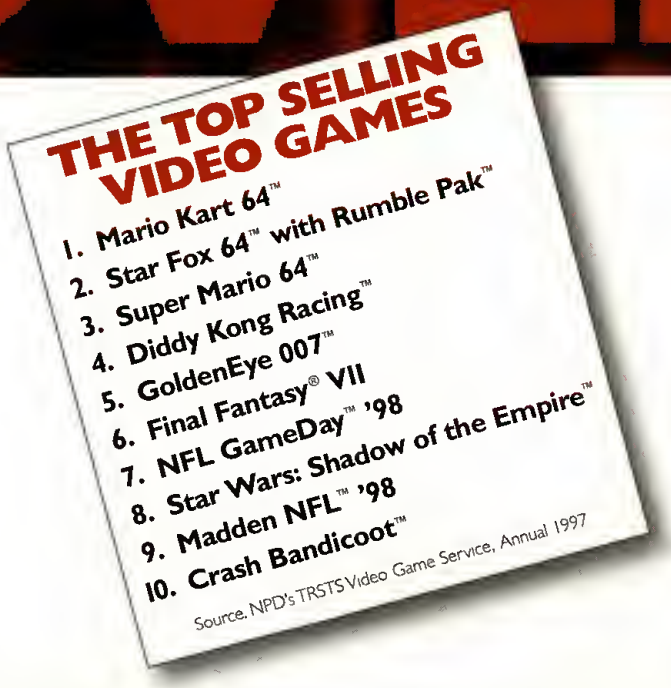
In almost every game like Space Invaders *or* Galaxian, *everything comes down at you. Our idea was that being in the center of something would cause incredible panic. Things are coming from all sides and you're just like, "Oh my gosh!"*

— Eugene Jarvis

Jarvis' injury turned out to be a lucky break. Forced to spend a few days in bed after his accident, he thought about *Berzerk*. One thing he didn't like about the game was that its button-and-joystick control scheme forced players to run towards enemies to shoot them. Jarvis decided that he needed to fix that problem for *Robotron*.

Because of his cast, Jarvis couldn't handle standard joystick and button controls. He and DeMar rigged a special controller by attaching two Atari 2600 joysticks to a panel; one joystick controlled the hero and the other aimed the gun. This unique controller setup actually enhanced the game by solving the shooting problem, so they kept it, and one of the great classics was born.

GAME OVER



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Book Review

Official Videogame and Pinball Book of World Records

Walter Day's compilation of high scores may be flawed, but it's the most ambitious book of its kind

$19.95
Sunstar Publishing, LTD
116 North Court Street
Fairfield, Iowa 52556
www.twingalaxies.com

Twin Galaxies was the self-proclaimed greatest arcade of all time during the '80s, earning accolades from major publications and making Ottumwa, Iowa — the arcade's hometown — the "videogame capital of the world." Walter Day, the official record keeper for Twin Galaxies, takes readers back to the days of *Pac-Man* with Twin Galaxies' *Official Videogame & Pinball Book of World Records*.

The book's more than 900 pages primarily catalog high scores of home, arcade, and pinball games, using about a quarter of the page to retell events leading up to the more publicized tournaments. The book was compiled from multiple sources, including *Nintendo Power* and *RePlay* magazine. Hardcore gamers hoping to find their name among the champions should peruse the source index first, though, since many other "official" record-keeping organizations have yet to be included. Also, the posted scores aren't dated, so trying to find how long a record has been standing is impossible.

That aside, the book serves a greater purpose. Thanks to companies releasing compilations of classic games, players can now go back and try to beat world records. A special section details how to officially enter new high scores for modern games as well as classic ones, and the giant lists bring back fond memories of games nearly forgotten.

The book is only the first of what should be a long-lasting series. As time goes on, sources should increase and the book will become more comprehensive. Until that time, readers should be kept occupied trying to join the ranks of the greatest gameplayers of all time. ng

Arcadia

by **Marcus Webb**, editor of ***RePlay*** magazine

Acclaim exits coin-op

Acclaim Entertainment announced on March 6 that it was closing its coin-op division, Acclaim Coin-Operated Entertainment Inc., based in Mountain View, California. The move is somewhat surprising since Acclaim has continued to develop original games, such as *The Gathering: Armageddon*, and its own version of the arcade PC platform, using specs from the Open Arcade Architecture Forum. Acclaim was also a significant presence with that equipment at the ATEI show in London. *Armageddon* may be licensed to another manufacturer for coin-op, as well as converted to a home videogame for PCs.

Sega's own arcade PC reportedly backed by other Japanese factories

The background: Sega will introduce to the U.S. market this year a universal coin-op video platform that uses PC-based technology, game software on CD-ROMs, and operating software from Microsoft. The same basic technology will be used next year in Sega's Katana or Naomi home videogame console. The news: Reportedly, Sega has approached 40 or more third-party suppliers to support the coin-op version of this platform with arcade software. These suppliers include some of the biggest names in Japanese coin-op manufacturing — factories normally considered to be among Sega's keenest arcade rivals.

Reliable sources confirmed to Arcadia the gist of these reports, including the identity of one major rival Japanese factory that has agreed to produce software for the new Sega system. However, contrary to some reports in the Japanese press and elsewhere, Sega's top arcade competitor, Namco, was not committed to supporting the new platform. This information comes from Namco of America President Kevin Hayes, who spoke with Arcadia at press time.

Betson plans national arcade chain

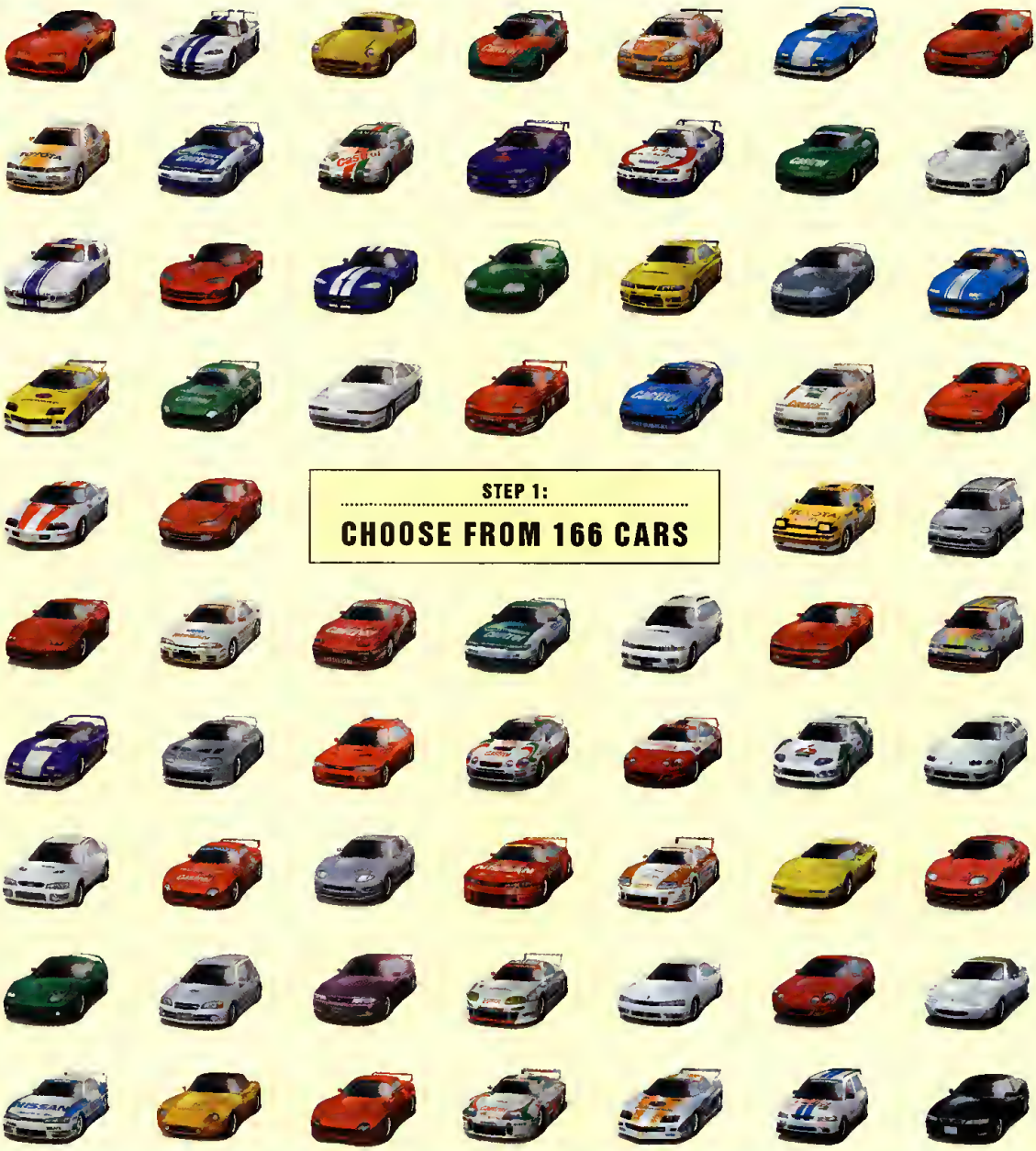
America's largest distribution chain for arcade games, Betson Enterprises, has entered the arcade business with a nifty themed funcenter in the Stadium Promenade, an outdoor "entertainment mall" in Orange, California, just four miles from Disneyland. Betson CEO Peter Betti called it "the first of what we hope will be many" similar arcades across the country. Betson is planning two more arcades this year for Southern California and multiple openings coast to coast for 1999.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, Betson plans to build perhaps a dozen sites of roughly 7,500 to 8,500 square feet under the name "The Garage." Betson will also set up competitive video driving leagues, including competitions and tournaments. ng

Betson's "Garage" arcades feature roll-up doors and a distinctly auto-centered theme, as well as other upscale attractions

THE RACE IS ON

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO MASTERING GRAN TURISMO



STEP 1:

CHOOSE FROM 166 CARS

Wanna see the other 99 cars? Play the game.

INTRODUCTION: 166 CARS, 11 TRACKS, 1 CHECKERED FLAG

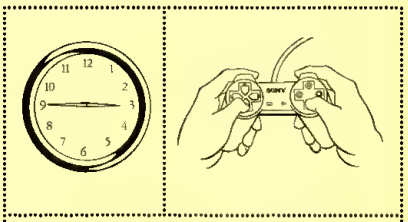
So you think you're a good driver? Can you thread the needle at 140 mph? Up for that? C'mon, leadfoot, put your skills to the test with the most realistic, in-depth, graphically rich racing game ever designed for the PlayStation® (or any gaming system): Gran Turismo.™ Choose from arcade mode, go head-to-head or compete on the GT Circuit. That's where the racing experience really comes to life as you drive for cash and then modify your car to go as fast as you can handle. Real racing pales in comparison.

STEP 2: GET A LICENSE

The Gran Turismo circuit is so competitive you can't even leak a drop of oil on the track until you've earned your license through a grueling qualifying series. Be sure to practice. Trust us, you'll need it.

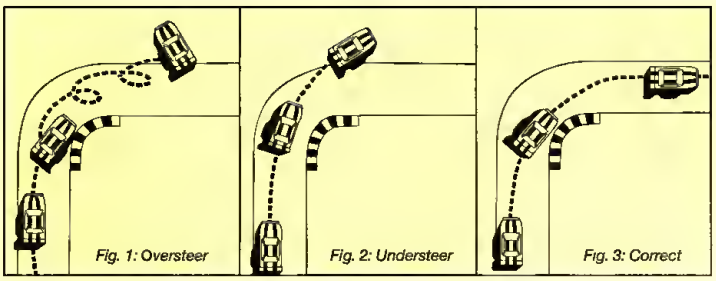
STEP 3: HANDLING YOUR CONTROLS

Use a clock as a reminder of correct hand positioning on your controller. Your left hand should be at 9:00 and your right at 3:00. *Note: Avoid digital clocks and watches for this exercise.*



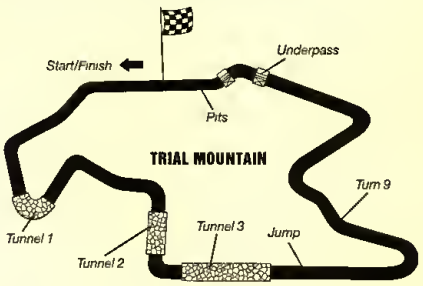
KEEP HANDS AT 9:00 AND 3:00

STEP 4: THE PHYSICS OF CORNERING

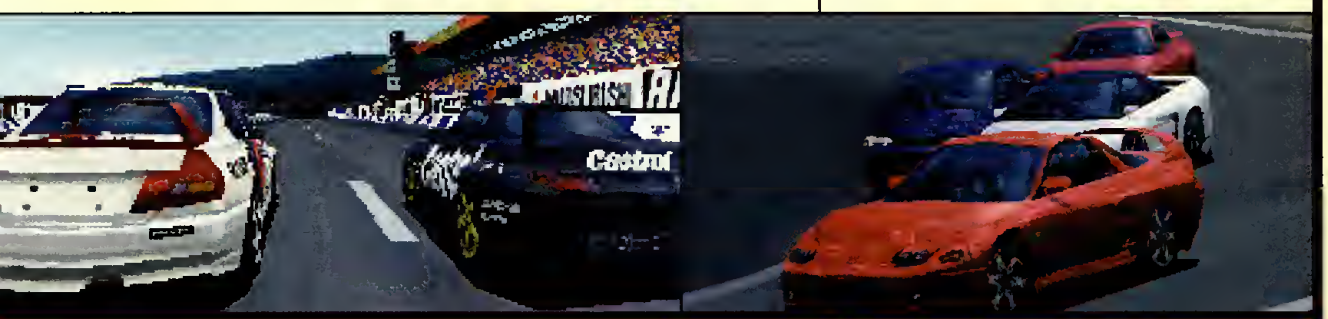


Hope you paid attention in physics class. Because the racing in GT is so realistic, it's based on the actual suspension, braking and engine systems of over 160 cars, as well as the dynamics of the track. Don't oversteer (fig. 1, rear wheels sliding out) or understeer (fig. 2, plowing with the front wheels). Find the right apex (fig. 3, correct turning angle) and accelerate vigorously (kick major tailpipe).

STEP 5: TEST THE TRACKS



Map the turns and braking paths before you hit the tarmac. Then test your car on all 11 tracks without the threat of competition around. You're trying to learn the course, not how to lose. Here's a tip: Take Trial Mountain's ***first two turns at full speed.***



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STEP 6:

RACING FOR COLD, HARD CASH

As a winning Gran Turismo driver, you'll find your bank account growing with every race. But don't treat your friends to lobster and caviar just yet; you'll want to sell that Subaru wagon you're driving and buy a new, faster car. Like a Dodge® Viper. And Vipers don't come cheap.

The more you win, the more money you make.
The more money you make, the faster you go.
The faster you go, the more you win.

STEP 7:

CUSTOMIZE YOUR CAR

Dodge Viper GT

A. ENGINE
Get a new engine or tune one to your personal specs with a turbo kit or gear ratio adjustment. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty.

B. TIRES
Improving splits may be as simple as making a pit stop for a quick tire change. The time you sacrifice is often made up with the control you gain.

C. BRAKES
Spending an inordinate amount of time staring at the wrong side of a pile of tires? Check the brakes. You don't have to be a crew chief to know that.

D. SUSPENSION
Adjust your spring ratio, soften your damper or decrease your camber force. Don't know what all that means? Learn fast or lose.

Spend some of your winnings on upgrades for your car. Try new brakes, a stiffer suspension or a turbo kit. Then machine-test your car to see how it's improved. Or not. Store all your customizations on a PlayStation memory card. It's a small price for a checkered flag.

ENGINE	*600hp, 8.0 liter, V-10*
TIRES	*F285, R336*
SUSPENSION	*multi-link*
MAX SPEED	*221 mph*
PRICE	*$125,000*

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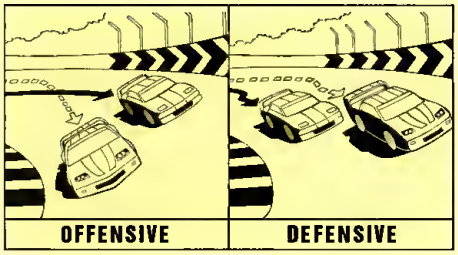
STEP 8: OVERTAKING

Any driver worth his salt can pass in the straights. It takes skill to rule the turns. For an inside offensive move, ***take*** a ***late*** a***pex*** and use your exit speed to pass. Or watch your opponent's defensive line and pass when you ***spot*** a ***weakness.***



STEP 9: LEARN THE LINGO

"I'm driving the big yellow bus that's gonna take you to school."

"You're more Gran-Ma material than Gran Turismo."

"You spend so much time in my exhaust you must enjoy the aroma of my stinky tailpipe."

STEP 10: GO HEAD-TO-HEAD

All your long hours of practice will be rewarded when you thrash your buddies in GT's ***two-player mode.*** And with PlayStation memory cards, you and your friends can race cars you've customized in your own personal garages. The action is just as fast, but the victory is twice as satisfying.

STEP 11: UPGRADE YOUR SYSTEM

DUAL SHOCK™ ANALOG CONTROLLER

The new Dual Shock Analog Controller brings the thuds and crunches of racing to life. Skid-out and it squirms in your hands. Crash into a pile of tires and it whips violently. And GT is just the first of many games that will take advantage of this new technology. It'll change the way you feel about PlayStation.

STEP 12: AHHH, WINNING

THE SWEET TASTE OF VICTORY

Relive your winning races, or defeats, again and again with GT's replay mode. Be sure to enjoy your moment of glory while you can, because victory is fleeting and, as the adage goes, second place is just a nice way of saying you're the first of the losers.

THE RACE IS ON.

GRAN TURISMO™

Get Real.

To play with the best online, you gotta have speed, reflexes, awesome timing... and the right equipment. DWANGO® puts you in today's hottest games like QUAKE II™ with high speed, consistent data transfer that makes real-time interactive multiplayer competition a reality. No delays. No waiting. Always 24-hour access to the action.

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How games will conquer the world

Every day, hundreds of people pick up computer and videogames for the first time. But can gaming really continue growing to rival TV and the movies?

The world of computer and videogames continues to change and grow at a frantic pace. As the industry races towards the next millennium, it is increasingly competing for mindshare with older, more established forms of entertainment, posing the question: Can games ever become as popular with mainstream audiences as TV and the movies?

In the 1950s and 1960s the rise of comic books seemed unstoppable, and many experts predicted that the growth of the comic book industry wouldn't stop until everyone — from housewives to the president — was reading. But the potential of comic books was never realized, and despite evolving and improving in many ways since the 1960s, the audience for comic books remains predominantly limited to young males. Videogames have the potential to conquer the world, but in spite of recent inroads into the mainstream, they also run the risk of going the same way as comics.

While in the past we've had our doubts, we've seen trends in the past year that have convinced us that barring a few worrying developments — we'll save those for another story in a few months — the evidence is overwhelmingly positive. Present here are nine trends **Next Generation** has identified that offer hope for the future, along with boxouts on some of the more specific things we can expect to see in games in the coming years.

1. Girls, girls, girls

Despite (or maybe because of) Lara Croft, gaming is still predominantly the domain of males. An IDSA (Interactive Digital Software Association) survey claims that in 1997 a whopping 73% of the videogame audience was male. Experts agree that this is an optimistic figure and that had old hand-me-down 16-bit systems and Game Boys been excluded from the survey, it could easily have read 90%. "The fact is that both movies and TV, the media that videogames aspire to, are gender neutral — they are enjoyed equally by men and women," points out Scott Steinberg of Crystal Dynamics, "and unless we come up with something for females to enjoy — unless there are games that our wives, girlfriends, mothers, and daughters want to play — it's always going to be difficult, if not impossible, for videogames to break through and challenge these other media."

Of all the gaming experts and industry insiders **Next Generation** approached for this feature, this is the one subject that came up most frequently. It's obvious that, for whatever reasons, most women simply aren't interested in gaming — and that grabbing their attention will be a lot trickier than one might at first imagine.

"The gender divide is clearly one of the major issues facing videogames," agrees M.I.T. Professor Henry Jenkins. "In the fall we have a book coming from M.I.T. Press that tries to address many of the issues surrounding gender and computer games. And in studying this, we've realized that it's a very complex issue. On the one side you have a group of developers aiming to bring more female characters and a more feminine approach to existing structures, and on the other side you have a group that claims this

***Tetris* is one of the few games with almost universal appeal, cutting across all ages and, more importantly, both genders**

approach is narrow-minded and patronizing. In between the two you have a very confused group of corporate executives who have no idea what girl games are going to be."

But there is hope. And as more and more companies devote resources to try and crack the problem, we are learning more about what games women enjoy. In her book *Joystick Notion*, J.C. Herz offers some thoughts about why some games appeal to women, with *Tetris* as the prime example. "*Tetris* is about coping," she explains. "It's about imposing order on chaos. It's about detritus raining down on your head, trash falling into messy piles and piling up until it finally suffocates you. This is a scenario to which many modern women can relate." She goes further, offering that "the psychological payoff for the player is a state of rapturous relief. 'Yes!' she thinks. 'Yes! The Mess is vanishing! I can make The Mess disappear!' It's not about blowing things up. It's about cleaning things up." Her conclusion? "*Tetris* speaks volumes about the difference between women and men vis a vis videogames."

Herz also quotes Barbara Linz, a game designer for Byron Preiss, on the subject of Namco's *Ms. Poc-Mon* — another game that women enjoyed. "Rule Number One: If you're selling to girls, make it very clear that that's who you're selling to. [Girls are] highly socialized. They need permission. One of the cool things about *Ms. Poc-Mon* was that it told you right off the bat: This is a female game," Linz observed. She goes on to explain why else *Ms. Poc-Mon* appealed to women: "Being able to go forward, backward, left, right was extremely important. See, in a normal, typical side-scrolling game, you have to go from left to right. You can retreat if you want to, but it's not going to advance you in the game. It's really not part of the basic strategy. But for a female, retreating is like breathing. We're used to the idea that you can win by giving ground." The conclusion? "*Ms. Pac-Mon* works because you can retreat. You can sneak up on your opponents. [Girls are] very big on sneaking up."

Debate rages about Lara Croft. That she's attracted some female gamers is certain, but how many has she pushed away?

Henry Jenkins, professor, M.I.T.

"The gender divide is clearly one of the major issues facing videogames"

There are several companies, most notably Purple Moon Interactive, geared solely to putting these kinds of insights to work. Its task is to get girls playing games, and they are aided in this quest by mainstream software publishers who now have resources allocated to their own in-house research. Academics are also contributing, as Professor Jenkins points out. "Out of the confusion, people like Theresa Duncan [Nicholson] and Brenda Laurel [Purple Moon] are offering us new models of what videogames should be," he offers. "These two women are taking radical new approaches with a view to offering new experiences that women can enjoy. Some of Brenda Laurel's new work is opening up the possibility of videogames becoming a better storytelling medium. On the other hand, Theresa Duncan has taken a different direction and says that maybe it's not about storytelling but about the creation of interesting, beautiful spaces that can be explored." And the true beauty of this research? "We're not just learning about why women enjoy some types of games but not others," Jenkins observes, "but we're learning new gaming possibilities and structures that will be of interest to all gamers — male and female."

Already online gaming is making significant inroads with the female audience. "With our role-playing games, such as *Gemstone*, 25% of our audience is female," says Neil Harris, executive vice president at Simutronics. "We attribute this success to emphasizing cooperation as much as competition. Currently, online gaming is all about killing, and this simply isn't attractive to a lot of people. So we try to make games where there is lots to do in a social, cooperative environment."

The day when the IDSA announces a "50/50" ratio of male to female gamers may be a long way down the road, but it's coming. And it will be good news for all gamers when it finally happens.

2. "It's community, stupid"

In NG 39 we asked MPlayer's Brian Moriarty what the industry has learned about online gaming over the last couple of years. His response? "'It's community, stupid.' Social contact is the thing that we're really selling here," he revealed. "Our job at MPlayer is really about bringing together people who like to play games and like to talk about games — it's a common interest thing. When people come to MPlayer, really what they are buying is each other. I can't offer a percentage figure of exactly how important this social aspect is, but it's obviously the main thing. It's more important than the actual business of purely playing games."

As opposed to being criticized as a solitary, isolating experience, computer and videogames are now being praised as a means of getting people together. This has to be a good thing, and it's final proof that gaming has plenty to offer the mainstream as well as the archetypal teenage gamer. "A very high percentage of the activity that happens on MPlayer is chat, people hanging around in the lobbies and just talking," Moriarty explains, "and they're not necessarily — or even very often — talking about the games that they

are ostensibly there to play." The point is that gaming has created a hospitable environment that will help attract newcomers to join in the fun.

Certainly there are those online gamers who simply rove the Net in search of *Quake* servers with the lowest ping rates, only to silently decimate as many opponents as possible before moving on. And you can be pretty sure that making friends with grandmothers in Michigan isn't on Thresh's list of top priorities when he logs on. It could be argued that *Ultima Online* may be a little too complex for this anticipated new wave of gamers, but it's blazing a trail that others will follow. And the fact remains that online, socially oriented gaming is seen by many experts as the brightest hope for a mass-market future.

"We see massively multiplayer Internet titles as being key to bringing a lot more people into gaming," says Simutronics' Harris. "This is because of the emphasis on gaming as a social experience rather than as a solitary, intellectual experience. When people of my generation learned how to play games, it was with a board or a pack of cards, and a group of friends sat around the table. What computer and console games did was design games for the individual and make gaming a more solitary experience. But now, when we think of tomorrow's multiplayer games, we think of thousands of players taking part at the same time. When that happens you'll have a very large pool of people to socialize with, so the chances are very good that over time you'll build up a group of players who will become your friends, and soon you'll be going online as much to see them as to play the game."

And it's not just the online-specific industry that's in on the act. "Two years ago it wasn't so clear to game publishers that they needed to have a multiplayer component in their games," explains Moriarty. "In 1998, it's obvious to all publishers that every game has to have a multiplayer component."

Even console and stand-alone games are following the trend. Nintendo signified its belief that multiplayer was important when Nintendo 64 launched with sockets for four joypads. The steady increase in multiplayer games for PlayStation can be seen as Sony's vote of support, and seemingly each month a new game offers a new multiplayer component (such as *Turok 2*'s frag tag mode) that provides additional proof that multiplayer gaming is here to stay.

3. Focus

Another recent trend is specialization. More and more developers are playing to their strengths and homing in on one specific genre. Id leads this trend as kings of the first-person shooter, but it's clear to see that studios such as Blizzard, 3D Realms, and Sid Meier's Firaxis follow similar strategies. Even platform by platform, companies such as Crystal Dynamics have decided that the risks of placing all of its eggs in one basket (in Crystal's case, PlayStation) are worth the added expertise and development skill that such a strategy yields.

Of course, there's the perennial temptation to diversify. Every game studio cringes inside when such rudimentary games as *Myst* or *Deer Hunter* dominate the charts. "We could have done that!" is easy to say after the fact, but as LucasArts' Jack Sorensen warns, venturing into unfamiliar territory is not always advised. "By trying to aim at an entirely different market we could undermine what it is that makes us successful. There is an audience for our games, it's a global one, and they appreciate what we do. Sometimes it'll pay off, and we'll make a lot of money. Sometimes we'll lose a little money. But it's a viable business. Trying to divert our talent away from this business would be a big mistake."

Very few companies have suffered through specialization. There are countless instances where trying to do too many things at once has proven to be very costly. "In the late 1980s and early 1990s a lot of people lost a lot of money with coin-op," reminds Sorensen. "It nearly brought down MicroProse, and EA lost a bunch." The trend of specialization has brought excellence and consistency to the game industry.

4. Glad to be games!

Five or six years ago, when the multimedia boom and the whole "Siliwood" craze promised to unite the technical smarts of the game industry with the production values and glamour of Hollywood, an unpleasant side to the game industry was revealed: a deep-seated inferiority complex. There was little doubt as to which side of the Silicon Valley/Hollywood relationship had the upper hand — and the game industry's blind fawning and awestruck fascination with its prospective partner reeked of a small, weedy industry desperately seeking approval and a sense of legitimacy from the outside world. As LucasArts' Jack Sorensen says in this month's interview (see page 10), "That whole 'Siliwood' thing pissed me off simply because it looked like games needed to be saved."

Inevitably, Hollywood was more than happy to believe the game industry's flattery and accept the red carpet welcome. Rocket Science epitomized the woeful consequences of this attitude, arrogantly strutting in the media

What's ahead for online gaming

Online gaming is a modern phenomenon for most players. The ability to play games on the Internet or over a network has redefined the entire game arena. Gaming once involved standing (on your own, typically) in front of an arcade box, but now it has developed a social aspect and is even — with the advent of professional deathmatchers — threatening to achieve the status of a full-blown sport.

Anyone who has ever played an MUD will be aware that most have fundamental problems. Sony, with *EverQuest*, has made an initial attempt to cope with the perennial poser of old hands ruthlessly dispatching newbies, using spells that diminish in power as more participants acquire them. We will see plenty more such gameplay twists, designed to tilt the balance of power in favor of neophytes, unless human instinct shifts sufficiently for online gamers to adopt some sort of conduct code (which is unlikely — external control is anathema for online gamers), or things get so bad that online apartheid ensues.

Online gaming services — and particularly the MUDs — will work furiously to install the necessary hardware at their ends to allow more people to play their games at any one time. The difficulty of this, and the expense involved, should not be underestimated, and the MUDs that build expandability into their worlds will win. But when this backbone infrastructure is in place (and the likes of cable modems and, perhaps, ADSL expand bandwidth), the possibility of a whole raft of new online game genres will open up.

Improved AI and ALife techniques will bring large-scale combat games to the Net, especially when AI becomes intelligent enough so that, in the context of a game, NPCs will be indistinguishable from human players.

The world of TV is currently eyeing online gaming, and the two seem destined to collide in the near future. This may take the form of extended online versions of TV serials — particularly when some form of natural language interaction with in-game characters not operated by humans becomes a reality. The issue of voice communication is already being pioneered by Multitude's *Fireteam*, and more efforts should follow.

Outside the U.S., where local telephone calls are not free, online gaming has been failing to meet the targets predicted for it, and online gaming services frequently go bankrupt. Economics dictate that such conditions will hold online gaming back to a certain extent, and the hellish infrastructure costs mean that online gamers shouldn't expect too much too soon. But if and when the World Wide Web goes 3D, new breeds of online games, from educational treasure hunts to virtual soap operas, will appear. Players will be able to test whether, say, they'd cut the mustard as a detective, and the boundaries between online socializing and online gaming will blur.

Online gaming's Utopia would involve cheap wireless Internet access from handheld consoles, meaning that people could play online no matter where they are, and who's to say that this will never happen (although it's difficult to see where the necessary technology will come from)? But until it does, online games will continue to make incremental advances in graphics and gameplay, and they will build momentum as a competitive pastime. Perhaps they will even achieve Olympic ratification one day.

Simutronics' *Hercules and Xena* offers a chance to be a hero and form a community online, even though text-based

spotlight before releasing a dog-awful game chock full of production value but lacking any gameplay whatsoever. MPlayer's Moriarty was an employee of Rocket Science at the time and offers the following inside commentary of the mood in the studios: "Too many people within the company saw Rocket Science as a means of getting into Hollywood. They didn't want to make games, they wanted to hang around Hollywood sound stages getting massages from good-looking babes. What did they know about games? Nothing. Steve Blank, the CEO, was a very smart guy but he wasn't a gamer — he wouldn't even let his own kids play videogames. I was the hired 'expert,' but they didn't listen to me. Ultimately," Moriarty concludes, "the Rocket Science executives were out to be Hollywood moguls ... I think we all learned a very expensive lesson."

The good news is that the entire industry seems to have learned a lesson and that today there's a far greater mood of confidence, autonomy, and pride in the game industry than there was five years ago. "There's no longer any sense that Hollywood is going to show us how it's done. No one believes that anymore," says Glen Entis, CEO of DreamWorks Interactive. "And everyone's learned that a successful movie doesn't necessarily translate to a great interactive product. It can help with marketing, and the retailers like it, but thinking that you can simply repeat the film with the game is a recipe for disaster."

Having worked closely with the movie industry since the success of *Aladdin*, Dave Perry can offer another unique perspective. "The movie studios lost millions when they started getting involved with games because they didn't understand the business. They thought that they had content that the game industry could use that was valuable to us. What they've learned is that their content doesn't really work for us but that our content can be great for them. *Primal Rage* did fantastically on toys, and *Tomb Raider* is going to be a blockbuster movie. So the studios' way of looking at it has changed by 180 degrees."

Entis agrees that a hard lesson was learned. "What everyone has figured out is that when making games, as with any other medium, you have to start with the basics," he says. "So what the movie studios are doing now is either forging partnerships with a strong game company, or if they are starting their own thing, basing it on a principle of great gameplay first and then seeing how they can implement their intellectual properties later." Universal Interactive's Mark Cerny concurs. "The successful convergence of Hollywood and the game industry probably doesn't lie in creating games in a Hollywood fashion," he says. "Instead the key is utilizing Hollywood talent to increase the production values of the games. *Abe's Oddysee* and *Crash Bandicoot* are both excellent examples of this new partnership."

Another great example of the game industry and Hollywood working well together is to be found, once more, at Simutronics, which is currently enjoying success with its Internet RPG based on two popular Universal shows. "It's very clear that you have to be very careful with the intellectual properties you work with," says Neil Harris. "With *Hercules and Xena* we were very fortunate that the TV show and the interactive multiplayer game work so well together. The show easily translates to an interactive, participatory experience — it's not just about two heroes, it's about an entire new world. It's about good and evil, magic, gods, and adventure. There's a lot of exploring and fighting to be done. Most of the properties in media other than games are character-driven, and for an online game this causes problems because, of course, not everyone can be that character. Being one of the characters from, say, *Clueless* wouldn't be any fun at all, but being your own character in the world of *Hercules and Xena* is very appealing."

One interesting final note on this subject: When 3DO first unveiled its plans in 1993, Trip Hawkins refused to refer to his hardware as a "game machine" — instead, it was a "multimedia player." A couple of years later — after the Rocket Science debacle — when Sony was launching PlayStation in the U.S., it refused to use the word "multimedia." PlayStation, it decreed, was 100% a "games machine." And rightly so.

5. More for less

"For computer games to have the same impact as TVs and movies, people have to have access to it," argues Andy Kean, vice president of marketing at 3Dfx. "How many people don't have TVs? Not many. And the people who don't have probably made a conscious choice not to own one. How many people can't go see a movie? It's certainly within the reach of most people. And so if games stand a chance of having as big of an impact as

"There is an audience for our games, it's a global one, and they appreciate what we do"

Jack Sorensen, president, LucasArts

movies and TV, then we have to get the hardware — the PC — inexpensive enough for most people to afford."

The good news is that it looks as though this is happening. While die-hard gamers would still not dream of playing on anything less than a $2,500 rig, it is now possible to pick up a decent gameplaying PC with 3D acceleration for around $1,000. PC prices are dropping across the board, fueled by natural technological evolution and an industrywide desire to get more people online. This is great news for the game industry because it means that more and more people will be able to buy a PC and start to enjoy gaming. It also means that more affluent households can afford to own two or maybe even three PCs, giving the kids (the primary gameplayers) a machine of their own.

Software prices are falling, too. In the early 1990s $60 was standard for a new Genesis or Super NES cart. Now, thanks to the use of CD-ROMs instead of cartridges, prices have been reduced across the board. Even console prices are falling. Historically, the pattern is for each new generation to start off costing around $300 (even more, in some cases), but prices soon drop to "less than $200," then to "less than $150," and eventually to the magic $99 price point. In real terms, however, given that one dollar in 1998 is worth much less than one dollar in 1988, this means that prices have dropped significantly. Sega's Bernie Stolar has confided to **Next Generation** that even $299 is considered "too expensive" for the upcoming launch of Katana.

6. Freedom of speech

The complexity of the interface between player and computer is crucial not only in terms of determining how sophisticated an interactive experience can be, but also whether or not beginners will be able to understand how to participate. It would be easy to think that you can't have both: Either an interface offers a lot of depth but is too complicated for novices, or it is so intuitive that anyone can pick it up but it can only cope with basic commands. The good news is that it is possible to have the best of both worlds and that the technology that will deliver it is speech recognition.

The game industry has flirted with the idea of using speech recognition for years, but only recently has the technology matured and home computing power increased to enable its practical application. It is **Next Generation**'s prediction that within the next three years speech recognition will be an integral part of many PC games. It may even be integrated (even if only by means of an optional peripheral) into the next generation of consoles. "Voice recognition is my big ticket for the next five years," says Dave Perry, "and Shiny's going to be all over voice recognition like a rash."

Speech recognition is exciting for many reasons. Speech is a means of communication

The history of game pricing

Are games too expensive? Some argue that games will never reach legitimacy until the cost of hardware and software comes down. They have. Consider the following lists, which show the launch prices of classic game hardware and software, and how much those systems would cost in today's dollars. While the prices of games and hardware have stayed steady, in fact the actual cost of gaming has decreased radically. All indications show that the cost of hardware and software are continuing to drop as well. Source: Consumer Price Index (1997 figures were used).

Prices at launch:		List	Today's dollars
1975	Altair 8800 (kit)	$397	$1,184
1975	Altair 8800 (assembled)	$498	$1,486
1977	Apple II 4K RAM	$1,298	$3,438
1977	Atari 2600	$199.95	$530
1977	Commodore PET (Personal Electronic Transactor)	$599	$1,587
1977	TRS-80 Model 1 base system	$399.95	$1,059
1978	Bally Professional Arcade (AKA Astrocade)	$299	$736
1979	Atari 800	$1,080	$2,388
1979	Intellivision	$299	$661
1981	First IBM personal computer	$1,565	$2,764
1982	Atari 5200	$299	$497
1982	ColecoVision	$199.95	$333
1982	Commodore 64	$595	$989
1984	Macintosh	$2,495	$3,855
1985	Nintendo NES	$159	$237
1986	Sega Master System	$120	$176
1989	Genesis	$200	$259
1990	Atari Lynx	$149	$183
1991	Game Gear	$149	$176
1991	Super Nintendo	$199	$234

Software:

1975 Altair Basic by Bill Gates and Paul Allen — $500 ($1,491) or $75 ($223.72) when purchased with an Altair
1998 Visual Basic 5.0 Professional — $249

The median year (1982)

In many ways 1998 is very much like 1982 — the game market was/is going strong in both years, and while some consoles (2600 in '82, PlayStation in '98) were/are showing signs of age, there was and is great software being produced for all consoles. Let's examine, then, the costs for games and accessories in 1982 — console prices had decreased from launch prices by then but were still well in excess of the cost of consoles today.

Software 1982	Then	Today's dollars
E.T. (2600)	$34.86	$57.97
Pac-Man (2600)	$29.86	$49.65
Pickaxe Pete (Odyssey 2)	$29.86	$49.65
Cosmic Raiders/Defenders (Astrocade)	$28.86	$47.99
Zaxxon (ColecoVision)	$49.86	$82.91
Venture (ColecoVision)	$30.86	$51.32
Munchman (TI 99/4a)	$33.86	$56.30
Dungeons & Dragons (Intellivision)	$44.86	$74.60
Gorf (Vic-20)	$33.86	$56.30
Hardware 1982		
Astrocade	$239.86	$398.88
Astrocade ZGrass Computer	$479.86	$798.00
Atari 2600	$129.86	$215.95
Atari 2600 joystick	$10.95	$18.20
Atari 400	$269.86	$448.77
Atari 800	$649.86	$1080.71
Atari home computer floppy disk drive	$499.86	$831.26
ColecoVision	$199.86	$332.36
Intellivision	$219.86	$365.62
Odyssey 2	$129.86	$215.95
TI 99/4A	$319.86	$531.92
TI joystick	$34.86	$57.97
TI disk controller card (required for floppy)	$210.86	$350.66
TI disk drive	$336.86	$560.19
Vic-20	$199.86	$332.36
Vic disk drive	$375.86	$625.05
Handheld 1982		
Mattel Long Bomb Football	$28.86	$49.65
Donkey Kong (Coleco Mini Arcade)	$59.86	$99.54

The future of graphics technology

The world of graphics is heading towards a crossroad for both PCs and consoles. The polygons' days are numbered, as they are currently becoming smaller and more closely packed. Eventually they will approach single pixels in size until they mutate into curved surfaces. According to 3Dfx's Scott Sellers, the next phase of 3D graphics hardware (and the current model has one generation left to go) will eschew the public-domain algorithms currently used in favor of new algorithms created from scratch. Sellers says that next year's 3D graphics iteration will concentrate on full-scene anti-aliasing; the lighting process, which will concentrate on technologies that allow more realistic lighting to be done at a pixel level; more realistic particle effects for representing elements like hair, smoke, rain, leaves, and snow; and more software-level features like dynamic tessellation and greater scalability.

Realtime images of the quality of *Toy Story* are a ways off — but perhaps not as far away as one might think

So what's beyond polygons? Curved surface representation — a difficult task to accomplish in real time, says Sellers. So how will this be achieved? Computer Artworks' Mark Atkinson offers an answer: "There are a few different techniques for this, which come under the general heading of process rendering. One solution is patch renderers and another is NURBs, which are pretty simple unless you want to create certain perfect shapes. Personally, we don't care if something isn't quite round, say, as long as it's quick. But the main problem that stands in the way is standardization. Everyone knows how to do triangles, vertices, Gouraud shading, and so on, but there's no standard beyond that."

On the console front, the way forward for graphics is somewhat murkier. Katana, of course, will use the PowerVR 2 chip in conjunction with a cut-down version of Windows to ensure that the nightmarish lack of developer support that afflicted Saturn won't recur, but this will not leave it in a position to outperform the PC graphicswise. Sony's PlayStation 2 remains shrouded in mystery, but it will adopt a proprietary approach to graphics and should, therefore (presuming it receives developer support akin to that of PlayStation), outperform the PC for a while. And as Nintendo 64 approaches the end of its life cycle, it will benefit from the kind of graphical tweaking that has brought solid-looking 3D games to the underendowed PlayStation. But the next generation of consoles are unlikely to make the leap beyond polygons, although it is conceivable that Nintendo's next console may make some attempt to cross this chasm.

That generation, though, will surely offer support for HDTV, although the continuing absence of a global standard means that players will almost certainly have to pay more for specific versions of games with increased clarity and a larger playing area, and only Triple-A titles will receive the HDTV treatment. This could affect PCs as well, which are beginning to appear at the heart of home theater systems.

As the TV world goes digital, it will spend much of its time trying to muscle into the game market. It has been suggested that the traditional console will be replaced by a TV set-top box with high-end graphics processing capabilities. But again, the fragmentary nature of TV is likely to leave game developers out cold — even if Microsoft succeeds in getting a Windows subset operating system on every set-top box in the world (which is very unlikely). And set-top boxes designed primarily to process TV will never be able to outshine custom-built consoles in graphical terms without proving prohibitively expensive.

In the shorter term, there are a number of question marks about the established graphics APIs. 3Dfx is adamant that Glide will survive, pointing out that it will always get the jump on Direct3D. But DirectX 6.0 will contain the first version of Direct3D, which at least makes use of all the 3D graphics hardware features available at launch. Glide will only survive as long as 3Dfx continues to keep ahead of the competition, but any company that overtakes it will do so with its own proprietary API. Microsoft and Silicon Graphics, meanwhile, have agreed to "merge" OpenGL and DirectX, creating an uber-API called Fahrenheit. The developer community is worried, with some justification, that this will place control of OpenGL in Microsoft's hands, but Microsoft and SGI contend that the best aspects of both APIs will be retained. Stung by Sega's adoption of PowerVR 2 (and confident that it can win its lawsuit against Sega), 3Dfx is currently busting a gut to get its hardware into the console market, and if, say, it could sign up PlayStation 2, then Glide's chances of survival will skyrocket.

The end result of all this graphical jockeying will be games in which developers are allowed to let their imaginations run wild. The transition will probably be painful for a while, but in the long run, it will give the game industry a massive boost. What kind of boost? As Sellers says, "The goal we've set out to achieve is to do the movie *Toy Story* in real time." There's something to look forward to.

that everyone understands. In the context of playing a game, it can be used in addition to conventional joypads and keyboards to expand the player's repertoire of commands — without cluttering the screen with extra icons or requiring additional buttons. It's guaranteed to add to the excitement of any action game (shout out the name of the weapon you want to switch to instead of having to scroll through an options menu) and add extra "human" depth to any adventure game.

There are, however, some technical hurdles before speech recognition enters mainstream gaming. First, most of the suggested uses for in-game speech recognition assume one- or two-word statements ("machine gun," "open door," "launch missile," and so on), but this isn't playing to speech recognition's core strength. Speech recognition works best when dealing with entire sentences — and entire sentences are simply too complex to be integrated into many of today's games. A second problem is that although gamers may be excited about the prospect of integrating speech into interactive entertainment, the scientists and corporations involved with the technology's development have bigger fish to fry. Right now it's widely held that the big pay-off for speech recognition technology will come from the emerging Chinese economy. Because the Chinese written language is so complicated (with thousands of individual characters), a simple, reliable alternative to typewriters or keyboard-based word processors would be a license to print money. Speech recognition is seen as this alternative, and thus the "Chinese problem" is the primary focus of its development — gamers (even Chinese ones) will have to wait.

7. We're all growing up ...

Many of the trends picked out in this feature are contributing to broadening the appeal of videogames. But the fact that more and more people are discovering games each day creates something of its own momentum. "Gaming is naturally broadening and becoming more mainstream each year, as those who grew up with videogames continue to play them as adults," points out Universal Interactive's Cerny. "Witness the huge percentage of PlayStation owners between the ages of 18 and 35. On the PC side, I believe that the more diverse interests of these young adults have led to the excellent sales of bass fishing and deer hunting games and that this audience's hunger for nostalgia made *Frogger* a breakaway hit."

Certainly the success of companies such as Mattel and Hasbro, and games such as *Barbie Fashion Designer* and *Reel Fishing*, is more than a blip. The presence of these companies from the mainstream toy and entertainment industry is proof that gaming is growing up. The increased number of people hooked up to the Internet has also broadened the appeal. "The brightest hope

for turning the games business into a mass-market business is the World Wide Web increasingly becoming a mass-market phenomenon," argues Moriarty. "What this means is that tens of millions of people can now have a chance to see our stuff. There is now a potential audience of gamers that is much larger than has ever previously existed."

Breakthrough, cross-cultural hits such as *Tomb Raider* help establish videogaming as a viable alternative form of entertainment and help turn casual experimenters into the hardcore gamers of tomorrow.

8. Praise be to the creative talent!

It's been noted regularly over the last couple of years that more and more of the game industry's top creative talent has decided to break from publishers and set up shop alone. Dave Perry, Sid Meier, Chris Roberts, Peter Molyneux, and now the Gathering of Developers are some of the more high-profile examples. This trend is a symptom of the game industry starting to value its creative talent a little more highly than in previous years. This has to be a good thing. Certainly, the cult of personality can be every bit as dangerous as the cult of technology (witness the hype surrounding John Romero's founding of Ion Storm), but **Next Generation** firmly believes that the game industry's success ultimately rests on the shoulders of the elite game creators.

We don't begrudge them their Ferraris one little bit.

9. Artificial Intelligence keeps getting smarter

As anyone who's ever dated Claudia Schiffer will tell you, looks can go a long way on their own. But if games are to continue evolving, then it's not enough for graphics to continue improving unilaterally. It's no good building lush 3D worlds if the creatures that inhabit them can't live up to their surroundings. Games will need to be populated with intelligent characters every bit as vibrant and sophisticated as the 3D, texture-mapped worlds they live in. And this is where Artificial Intelligence comes in.

Luckily, there are a couple of trends that offer hope. First, the single-player game is enjoying something of a renaissance. After *Doom* introduced the phrase "deathmatch" to the gamer's vocabulary, in-game character AI was put on the industry's back-burner. Why bother wasting development time trying to make computer characters fight like real humans when you can use real people instead? *Quake* epitomized this new thinking, forsaking the one-player experience in favor of creating the ultimate multiplayer event. In this, Id largely succeeded. But, inevitably, gamers came back to demanding that games fulfill both single and multiplayer modes. The result is

The future of the game business

Pondering the future of the videogame business is exactly the same exercise as pondering the future of videogames themselves. It all comes down to the same question, which is: Will games get better?

All the greenbacks and mobile phones and bad suits and stupid meetings end up at the same Darwinian crossroads: The future of the game business is better games.

Business in this business is nothing more than the links between the various participants — manufacturers, developers, publishers, and retailers, plus assorted low-life distributors, marketing agencies, media, etc. Changes in the business manifest themselves as changes in the relationships between two or more of these elements. Sure, technology and skill levels are bound to improve, as they always have, which of course will be to the benefit of game consumers. But the revolution that holds the most promise for better games is a change in the way games are distributed.

Online retailing has already arrived, and the business has shifted slightly as a result. Most likely, its replacement of traditional retailing will be a long, slow process, and there's a reasonable argument that it will never replace the old-fashioned habit of buying products over the counter. But if one could imagine a scenario where online retailing displaced traditional retailing completely, in a short time frame we would begin to see huge ramifications for every element of the business.

Retailing is a massively expensive and wasteful exercise, certainly in comparison to buying products over the Internet and having games distributed not on discs in boxes, but over the wires. First of all, take away the raw elements — discs, cardboard, packaging. Then the warehousing, trucking, and distributing. Then the retailers' margins and their costs. Take all that expense away and we're left with a lot of money swilling around and one big question: Where does it go?

The most obvious answer to a cynic would be that publishers will pass on the benefits to their grasping shareholders. But not all publishers are driven by the sole agenda of making shareholders happy. They have to compete with companies with no such pressures, ones with agendas like making great games or selling large numbers of units at the lowest possible price. This natural working of the free market should yield two benefits: Some publishers will be able to offer games at lower prices than they currently do, while others will use extra revenues in the place where, arguably, we most want to see the money being spent — development.

The disappearance of traditional retailers would also take away one of the key reasons for publishers. Developers generally must deal with publishers to get their products to market, and a huge part of that is dealing with retail. Without the machinery of retail, developers no longer need the mechanics. So publishers will be forced to learn quickly how to take advantage of this new way of buying and selling. Will consumers still order games via online retailers? Or will they go direct to publishers, or even developers? Perhaps online magazines will morph into retail sites.

Clearly, some companies are not going to get it right while certain developers, seeing their chance to break into the lucrative world of development publishing, will overtake slow-moving publishers, stuck in 20th Century mode. Others, especially those who have weathered every change the industry has thrown at them, will probably survive.

Either way, we will always have operatives known as publishers. The future generation will include many familiar names, though it's a fair bet that this major upheaval in the way we conduct business will allow newcomers from the development community to seize their chance. Perhaps they'll include development communes in the style of the Gathering of Developers.

All this presumes faith that online retailing will be successful, but no one seems to be betting against it right now — Electronics Boutique, the most savvy of the game retailers, is also one of the most energetic players in the online marketplace. And if there was ever a perfect product to buy and sell via computer, it's computer games.

Harry Miller, CEO, Ritual (left)
Mike Wilson, CEO, G.O.O. (right)

It's too early to tell if Gathering of Developers will be the wave of the future in software publishing, but the business of publishing will inevitably change

that AI has been brought back to the forefront of developers' efforts: *Goldeneye*, *MDK*, and Id's own *Quoke 2* (or at least its expansion packs) have spearheaded this backlash within the first-person-shooter category, while *Age of Empires* and *Total Annihilation* currently offer examples of cutting-edge AI within the realtime strategy genre.

Other games paving the way forward include Valve's *Half Life*, in which computer-controlled enemies will not only retreat if outgunned, but also regroup and return with reinforcements for an organized counterattack. Clever stuff indeed.

Prax Wor from Rebel Boat Rockers hopes to take AI in a new direction by enabling players to command a platoon of colleagues within the first-person-shooter genre. *Bottlezone* and *Uprising* both add realtime combat smarts to established realtime strategy-style opponents.

But, of course, there is still a lot further to go. The more complex games become, the more the deficiencies in AI are exposed. In Blizzard's *StorCroft*, for example, the computer will give any solo player a run for his or her money — but not by playing like a human. The AI has to cheat by utilizing its ability to see all of the game terrain at once because it certainly can't hope to outmaneuver or outsmart any human player in straightforward combat.

Perhaps the brightest hope for intelligent behavior within games is the emerging technology of Artificial Life. Instead of attempting to mimic intelligent behavior by compiling a long list of rules, or a "script" (for example, "If character hits wall, then turn around and run the other way"), which is the AI approach, ALife starts with simple rules, in the hope that realistic behavior will emerge. There are numerous companies working on ALife around the world in many different industries and academic institutions, but the three companies to have enjoyed the most success within the gaming field are Anark with *Golopogos*, PF Magic with *Dogz* and *Catz*, and CyberLife with *Creatures*.

Next Generation interviewed CyberLife's Steve Grand in **NG 35**. He offered us the following vision of gaming's future and his opinions as to why ALife technology is essential to making this vision a reality. "Computer games have not yet come of age — they're still fundamentally very stylized, caricatured, and simplified systems, not far removed from board games," he argues. "Games are currently 'things you play,' but I believe they will increasingly become 'places where you go to play,' and this makes serious demands on their design. For a start, they must be capable of allowing you to choose what you play and how you play it, rather than imposing it on you. This means that all the components of the game world have to be vastly richer and more flexible. Secondly, as rendering improves, the stultified and naive behavior of existing NPCs [Nonplayer Characters] gets thrown into ever sharper relief. A white blob moving left or right used to be a good enough simulation of a tennis player, back in the days of *Pong*, but a full-blown 3D model requires something a little more sophisticated. This is where ALife becomes indispensable."

"Most players will be entering a game wanting to get away from responsibilities!"

CyberLife's *Creatures* (above) and PF Magic's *Dogz* and *Catz* (top) have brought ALife to the mass market

It's in populating game worlds with realistic characters that he sees as perhaps the best example of how ALife can make a big difference. "In future online games, or even advanced single-user ones, perhaps the biggest role for Artificial Life forms is as bit-part players," he suggests. "Anybody who plays a multiuser game will want to be a hero, but who's going to be the street cleaner or the barman? Most players will be entering the game just to get away from such responsibilities! It will be vital for the bit-part actors in such games to be as real and believable as the avatars of the real humans, even if their role is purely ornamental."

Adam Frank and Andrew Stern of PF Magic are also convinced of Artificial Life's potential. "The single most exciting thing about ALife is its ability to offer a convincing and interactive illusion of life," they offer. "[And] the best application of ALife gives users the opportunity to develop an emotional relationship with a virtual character they perceive as truly alive. These can range from loving, caring relationships to villainous, antagonistic, competitive relationships, and everything in between."

Both CyberLife and PF Magic plan to introduce yet more complex ALife into future products, and Anark has announced that the team responsible for *Golopogos* is now working on an RPG using its proprietary NERMs-based ALife technology. One thing is for sure, already there is no such thing as a mindless racer or a mindless shooter — gamers have demanded and are now getting more. Soon other genres of gaming will get equally smart.

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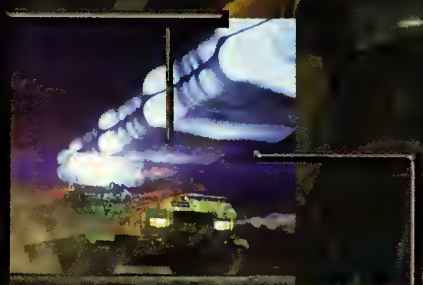

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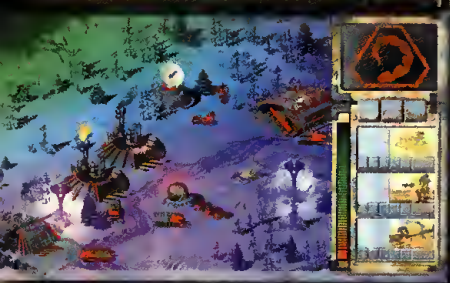

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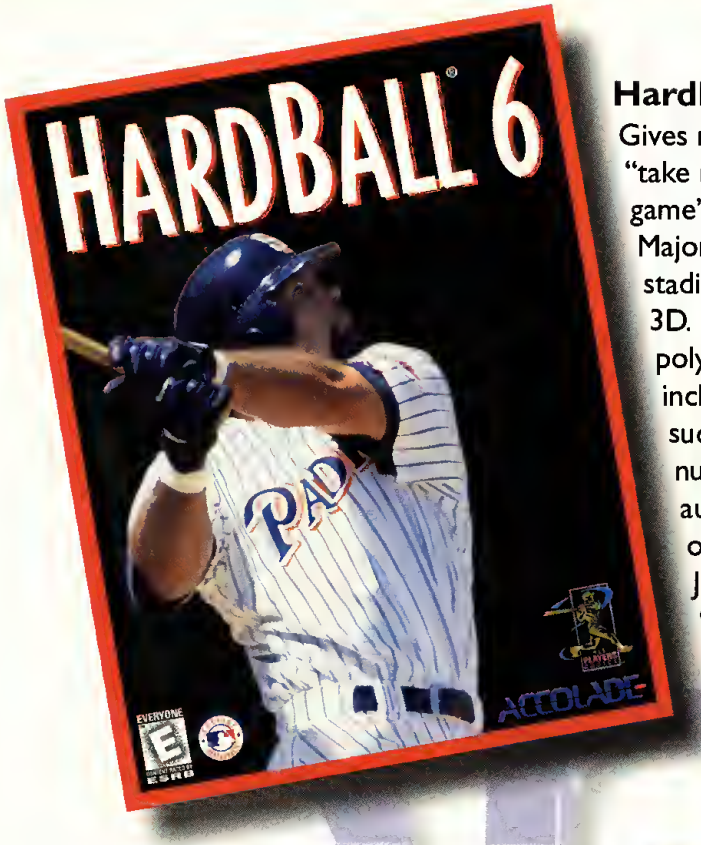

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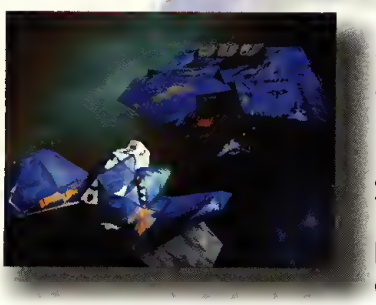

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-Winter 1998

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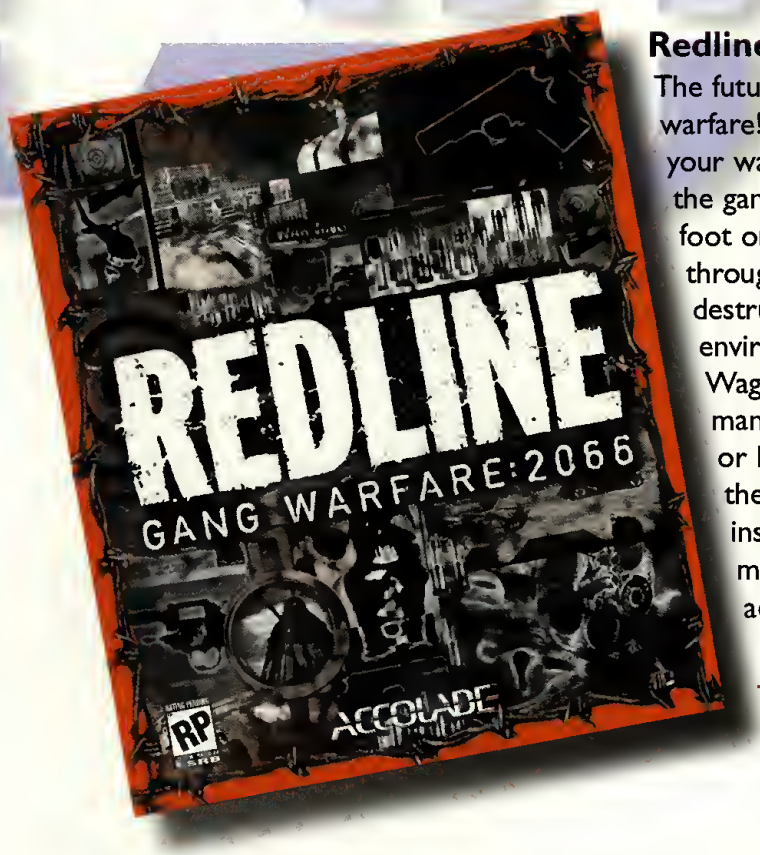

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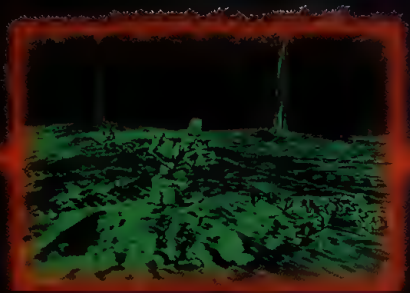

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Zelda: Ocarina of Time **Nintendo 64** Giants **PC** Spyro the Dragon **PlayStation** Rogue Trip **PlayStation** Arokh **PC** Slave Zero **PC** ESPN Digital Games **PC/PlayStation** Tomorrow Never Dies **PC/PlayStation** Prax War **PC**

alphas

Previewing E3 and beyond

As this issue breaks, **Next Generation** staff will be casually strolling the floor of E3. Why not madly running from booth to booth? Because having done our homework, we bring you the top games making their debut at the show. Enjoy.

66 **Zelda: Ocarina of Time** N64
Will this elf steal the plumber's crown?

66 **Spyro the Dragon** PlayStation
One little dragon, one big adventure

72 **ESPN Digital Games** PC/PSX
Can Radical bring the network prime time?

90 **Slave Zero** PC
Take giant mechs on a citywide rampage

84 **Giants** PC
A new and weird one from the *MDK* team

90 **FASA Interactive** PC
Can the house of *BattleTech* go digital?

66 **Arokh** PC
It's too good to describe in just one line

104 **Tomorrow Never Dies** PC/PSX
Never say never to a new Bond game

111 **Rogue Trip** PlayStation
SingleTrac travels beyond *Twisted Metal 2*

117 **LAPD 2100** PC/PlayStation
"Protect and serve" a future Los Angeles

123 **Prax War** PC
Overdue? EA's first first-person shooter

125 **VR Baseball '99** PC
Messiah technology goes to the show

milestones

Time Crisis 2	Arcade	127
Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver	PlayStation	128
Moto Racer 2	PC/PlayStation	128
Shaolin	PlayStation	128
Thief: The Dark Project	PC	129
Psybadek	PlayStation	129
Asteroids	PC/PlayStation	129
XCOM: Interceptor	PC	129
Buck Bumble	Nintendo 64	130
Sword and Sorcery	PC	130
Recoil	PC	130
Vigilance	PC	130
World Cup 98	PC/Nintendo 64	130

Legend of Zelda 64:
The Ocarina of Time

It's coming, and unless something terrible happens, it's going to be great

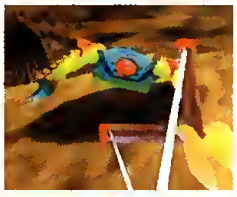
Format:	**Nintendo 64**
Publisher:	**Nintendo**
Developer:	**Nintendo**
Release Date:	**Q4 1998**
Origin:	**Japan**

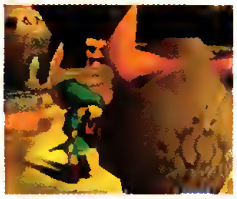
Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda. Ocarina of Time*, or *Zelda 64*, has to be one of the most eagerly awaited games of all time. Ever since the first screenshots were released to the press almost three years ago, anticipation has risen and expectations have spiraled to an unprecedented — and many think unrealistic — level. Yet judging by the playable demo shown recently to **Next Generation**, Nintendo may well have surpassed even the most demanding individual's wishes.

As typical of the company, Nintendo is keeping quiet about story details However, it is known that Link grows

Lightning reflexes, as well as a good head for exploration, are what it takes to lead Zelda to victory

The trend lately has been action/adventures with the focus on adventure. Not here — Link will face plenty of combat





Link's access to a variety of different weapons throughout the game adds depth to the play

throughout the game into an adult, and as he increases in size, his fighting and climbing skills improve accordingly. Furthermore, once fully developed, he's able to use magic, with which he can combat adversaries, for example. He does, of course, have plenty of other weapons available, including swords (short and long), bombs, a stick, a hammer, exploding magic nuts, a boomerang, and a bow and arrow, which can be fired using a first-person perspective when accuracy is of paramount importance.

Visually, *Zelda 64* will leave very few people unimpressed. All of the environments — complex towns, vast open expanses, and dark dungeons — feature endless texture-mapped polygons drawing farther out into the horizon than any other N64 game. This is also the first title for Nintendo's machine to boast realtime light sourcing. The resulting effect is startling, with the brilliantly animated characters and huge bosses casting varying shadows and reacting to the light around them.

The camera system is a much-revised version of the one used in *Super Mario 64*. The problem of performing combat in 3D with the joypad, which only controls 2D motion, has been a difficult issue for game developers. Most "3D" games, like *Tekken 3*, get around this problem by automating the camera, which allows combat to occur along a 2D plane. Not in *Zelda*. One of the most revolutionary aspects of this game concerns its control system, quite evident during battle sequences. Holding down the Z trigger button on the N64 pad forces the camera to adopt an over-the-shoulder view, and a cursor appears to indicate that Link is locked onto the adversary. Any sideways movement of the analog stick moves the hero around the enemy without ever losing sight of his target. The lock can be broken at any time by simply releasing the Z trigger. This feature can also be used to investigate any item found in the game, and Nintendo has indicated that this characteristic will be used in all of its

The first-person mode offers an entirely new paradigm for fighting in an action/

While the levels may not be as large as those of its predecessors, they should offer most gamers more than 40 hours of play time

subsequent 3D action titles.

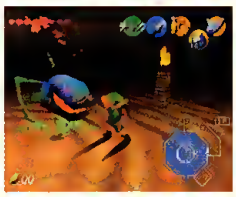
Also revolutionary will be the action button, which is contextually sensitive. At the top of the screen is a listing of what the B button can do at a given time. So if Link is running, the default will be "jump." If he is standing near a sign, it will change to "read," if he is near a ladder, it will change to "climb," and so on. This, combined with the incredibly well-designed camera, takes the immersive feeling of *Mario 64* to an entirely new level. When playing, one can literally forget about the controller and concentrate solely on what is happening onscreen.

Although the game remains true to its action/adventure roots, it also enables players to interact with the world in so many different ways that it should set a new high watermark for the genre, if not for all videogames. The variety in the environments — from wide open plains to hills and valleys to towns and dungeons — is immense. The ability to ride a horse, the huge number of weapons and combat methods, from swordplay to archery to bomb throwing (yes, a la *Bomberman*) — all of these things combine to make the experience simply unbeatable. Finally, the game possesses many of the little touches that make a game truly classic — if Link is holding a sword, he swims with only one hand (and his speed decreases), for instance.

Unfortunately, the game, which was originally destined for the 64DD, has now been relegated to a 16MB cart. While that is the largest N64 cart ever produced, given *Zelda*'s rich, lush graphics, there is some question as to whether the game will provide as much

RPG. This is one of the game's most stunning innovations

A boy and his horse: Link's equestrian companion should be the most fully developed NPC since Yoshi. Riding is one of the high points here



Unlike too many games for N64, *Zelda* boasts a variety of graphic looks to the levels

play time as its predecessors. Moreover, **Next Generation** has learned that the current hot rumor in Kyoto, Japan, is that an update to the game is planned for launch of 64DD, which should ship roughly six months after the game. Great for the 64DD, if it ever ships (we have our doubts), but bad for gamers if key elements of the game are left out to ensure good sales of 64DD in Japan or the U.S.

Is there any way a game as eagerly anticipated as *Zelda* can live up to expectations? It's worth noting that Nintendo has yet to disappoint us with a major franchise update. In fact, **Next Generation** views the recent delay of the project as, ultimately, a positive sign. Nintendo apparently lives by the same mantra that we once saw posted on the wall at a development house: "A late game is only late until it ships. A bad game is bad until the end of time." We applaud Nintendo for that. ng

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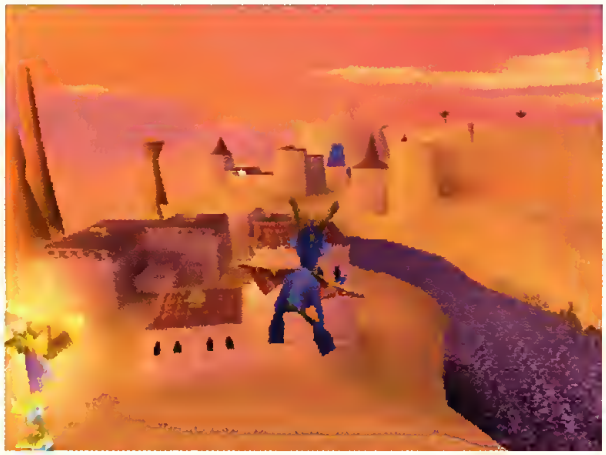
Spyro the Dragon

Insomniac's expansive 3D platformer breaks the fog barrier on PlayStation — and the game already plays better than most

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	SCEA
Developer:	Insomniac/Universal Interactive
Release Date:	September 1998
Origin:	U.S.



From a high-gliding perspective, one of *Spyro*'s colorful environments can be seen stretching deep into the distance. No fog here ...

Fog. If it's a 3D PlayStation game, chances are it's got fog (sometimes too much, as with *Magic Carpet* or *G.Police*). But Insomniac Studios, creator of the little-known but well-designed *Disruptor*, has done away with the ever-persistent mist in its latest game, and removing the smoke screen is just the start of some very smart game design.

Spyro the Dragon is an action platformer, and the emphasis is on character interaction, according to Mark Cerny, designer and Universal Interactive president. During the demo shown **Next Generation**, the nuances in character interaction made the game far more entertaining than the standard jumping from box to box fare normally associated with platform games. Insomniac President Ted Price explains one portion where Spyro is facing an armored enemy. "I can't flame this guy because he's got armor on," says Price, "unless he turns around, and of course, shows me his unarmored side."

As if on cue, the enemy character turns his unarmored side to Spyro, and Price sends a shot flame from Spyro's mouth up the enemy's back. This kind of comic interactivity is especially enhanced when the enemies display exaggerated and humorous animations. Many of the wacky enemies taunt, laugh, and even moon the player. This type of gameplay also leads to some well-designed puzzles — for instance, how will Spyro get around a character armored on two sides?

Cerny's design credits include *Marble Madness*, work on *Sonic 2* (he put together the Sega Technical Institute), and *Crash Bandicoot 2*. So it's not

Just one of the wacky enemies in *Spyro*'s world, this guy (above) attempts to beat Spyro with his pet bird

Spitting flames (above) and charging enemies are as fun as they look. Across this gorge (left) the landscape reveals two tunnel entrances

surprising that *Spyro*'s levels further reflect his maturation and mastery as a game designer. Unlike most platform games, *Spyro* does not feature unsupported pieces of land floating back and forth in the sky for no apparent reason. Instead, players encounter wizards who morph the terrain, complete with particle system spell animations. The wizards add continuity to the world, doing away with the kind of uninspired, take-it-for-granted design that marks too many platformers. Here, the wizards suspend moving platforms as well as the player's disbelief. The wizards are also an engaging target for Spyro. This marriage of character and level design is a hallmark of Cerny's design sense and a high point in the game.

While *Spyro* plays well with standard PlayStation controllers, a Dual Shock analog controller really enhances the feel

At first glance, *Spyro* looks very much like a kids' game. As the young dragon Spyro, players must free the other dragons who've been turned into crystal by an evil wizard. As with all platform games, exploring the environment, dispatching enemies, and collecting treasure make up the gameplay's 30 plus levels. Spyro's standard moves include running, jumping, gliding, and rolling. Yet his two attacks are a little different from most — he can breathe fire and charge horns-first into enemies.

Spyro can breathe fire and charge horns-first into enemies

Spyro is a kids' game in much the same way *Mario 64* is a kids' game. Like *Mario*, *Spyro*'s whimsical visuals belie a challenging game environment. *Spyro* may begin easily enough, but the difficulty will ramp up considerably. However, the game is not meant to be exasperating. Cerny's vision is to minimalize the frustration many gameplayers have with backtracking and the constant revisiting of the same areas. To that end, the game evolves in a nonlinear fashion, with (usually) multiple paths to various levels that come off a central area like spokes. Frequent continue points placed around the levels instill the game with even more accessibility, and if a player is really struggling, 1-ups appear more frequently.

Of course, the main gameplay goal is broken up by some pleasant

The dragonfly escorting Spyro keeps measure of the hero's health level

In order to board this ship (top right), Spyro must have a certain amount of treasure. Wizards (right) spawn enemies and move terrain

distractions. Occasionally, players will stumble upon a thief, and in a high-speed game of tag, players must chase down the nimble bandit to rescue a dragon egg. There are also several Treasure Rounds — bonus levels that incorporate a free-flight mechanic not unlike that in Sega's *Nights*, enabling players to load up on loot.

To bring *Spyro*'s impressive world to PlayStation at a rock-solid 30 frames per second, Insomniac developed several engines from what was the foundation of *Crash Bandicoot*'s Neaten engine. "The three fundamentally separate engines," says Universal Interactive Producer Michael John, "are the environment drawing, the Moby drawing, which is basically the enemies and objects, and then the cyclorama backgrounds."

The cyclorama backgrounds John is referring to are backgrounds that wrap around the level in a dome shape. This enables the team to texture the sky, map constellations, and add fantastic sunsets on the horizon. "Depending on how you count it," John says, "there is an excess of 30 renderers for all the different effects. The specular effects on the gems have a specular renderer, and there's a whole special rendering technique for armor so that it looks like armor."

The fog-free levels do come at a price, however. While Spyro, and indeed, all the characters are well-designed, they are much more obviously polygonal than they would be on Nintendo 64 or PC. Still, creating a game this technologically impressive on an aging platform like PlayStation is an impressive feat. The team clearly knows its stuff.

For music, Universal has turned to Stewart Copeland, drummer for The Police, who has also scored several films. Character voices were still being cast at press time, but Carlos Alazraqui, the voice of Rocko from Nickelodeon's animated series "Rocko's Modern World" (and the Taco Bell Chihuahua), is set to play Spyro.

Sony has managed to keep *Spyro* under wraps for a big E3 debut. There are 18 levels left to implement, and the first few are only missing trappings like the cinematics, voices, and death animations. It's quite obvious this one's going to succeed where *Blasto*'s artsy yet lackluster gameplay couldn't. In the poker game that has become game console longevity, *Spyro* certainly looks like one ace the hardware manufacturer has been keeping up its sleeve. Let's hope there's more.

Spyro is a 220-poly model with very smooth interpolating animations

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ESPN DIGITAL GAMES

ESPN Digital Games

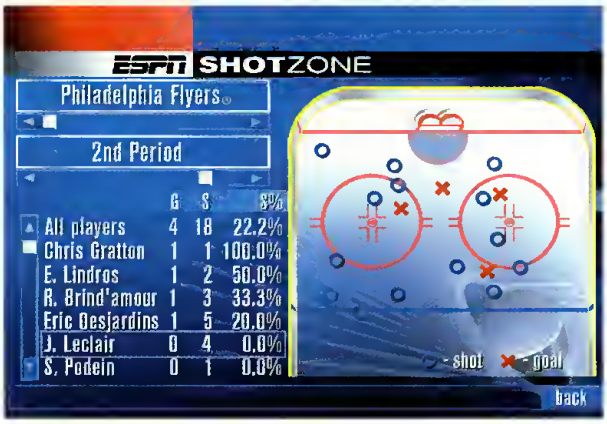
Is it another EA Sports wannabe, or does Radical Entertainment see a bigger picture? With a strong sports franchise, a unique distributor, and an experienced staff, Radical may successfully compete where many others have felt only the agony of defeat

***Pro Boarder* will be the first game under the ESPN label in the Extreme Sports category. The game will feature real riders and events from the X-Games, including the Big Air competition (above left) and back country free-riding**

To compete against EA Sports, many companies have taken a foolhardy approach, developing a seemingly fancy brand logo before giving any thought to the actual product. As a result, most of these brands, such as Data East's failed *MVP Sports* line and Interplay's struggling *VR Sports*, have either flopped or merely limped along. In the 32-bit age, only Sony Interactive and a few Konami titles have really given the major leaguers at Electronic Arts something to worry about.

But that could all change. Enter Mike Ribero, Radical's new chairman and CEO, and President Ian Wilkinson, who together courted Disney (parent company of ESPN) for two years before securing the brand's exclusive license through the year 2002. And with the help of one of Disney's

This section of the game was inspired by the lunatic boarders who actually jump sections of Colorado's I-70, a four-lane freeway



Following the *Powerplay* series, *National Hockey Night* is Radical's third hockey game, but the first under the ESPN brand

distribution arms, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Radical Entertainment becomes more than a developer-for-hire — it becomes the publishing partner of the ESPN Digital Games brand. Radical will have three games ready for PlayStation and PC when the brand launches this October: *NBA Tonight*, *National Hockey Night*, and *Pro Boarder*, a snowboarding title based on the X-Games.

"ESPN," says an impassioned Ribero, "is as much about entertainment as it is about sports. That's why it's called the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network." Ribero describes the upcoming games as "ESPN broadcasts you can play, complete with the personalities that make the network great, commercials that make the network funny, the production values, and the camera angles."

The brand is something of a coup for Radical, which since 1991, has grown from three to 300 employees and now has two development offices located in San Francisco and Vancouver, Canada. The company's most notable work to date has been *NHL Powerplay* for Virgin, and its least notable (another license) was Fox's *Independence Day*.

"ESPN is greater than any single persona," Ribero says. "It's not fraught with the peril of picking an athlete and watching that athlete get arrested." An embattled marketing veteran of Sega of America, Ribero reminds us, "When Joe Montana retired, so did *Joe Montana Football*. So did Sega's complete football franchise."

After fighting the seemingly unending stream of fires at Sega, Ribero and fellow Sega marketing man Tim Dunley joined Radical and have put together an impressive development studio/publishing office in San Francisco. This studio very much mirrors the campus atmosphere of the Vancouver office, which was co-founded by Wilkinson and Rory Armes, who heads up companywide development.

Armes, who left Distinctive Software as it became EA Canada, is no fan of the corporate development style EA is known for, where the internal competition is fierce. "We've channeled [our competition] externally," says Armes. "We don't compete internally. Hockey doesn't compete with basketball. Hockey and basketball work together to try to kick EA's butt. That's what it's all about."

In order for Radical to compete in the big leagues, it's needed the help of ESPN, which has been there for Radical in all aspects of development, including licensing. "Imagine Radical Entertainment going to the NFL," says Dunley, Radical's marketing VP, "versus ESPN going to the NFL after just signing a billion-dollar television rights contract and asking for most favored nation terms in the interactive entertainment category. That's what's happening."

Beyond harnessing ESPN's licensing

The interface screens are designed to mirror the ESPN broadcast artwork

At this stage, it's hard to predict exactly how well *NBA Tonight* will hold up against the competition, but the current build looks strong

muscle, Radical's development teams have been able to work directly with ESPN's broadcast crews. "Say we're rendering a stadium," Armes says. "All we do is say to the [ESPN network] production guy, 'Before you start your filming, throw a tape in and just do a circle from the cameras.'"

Armes mentions that ESPN is equally as helpful with sound, allowing Radical's audio guys to plug directly into the ESPN sound board and feed from any specific microphone. Usually Radical sends a few T-shirts or a PlayStation as a thank you, and the developers insist the experience with the network guys has been nothing except cordial and extremely helpful.

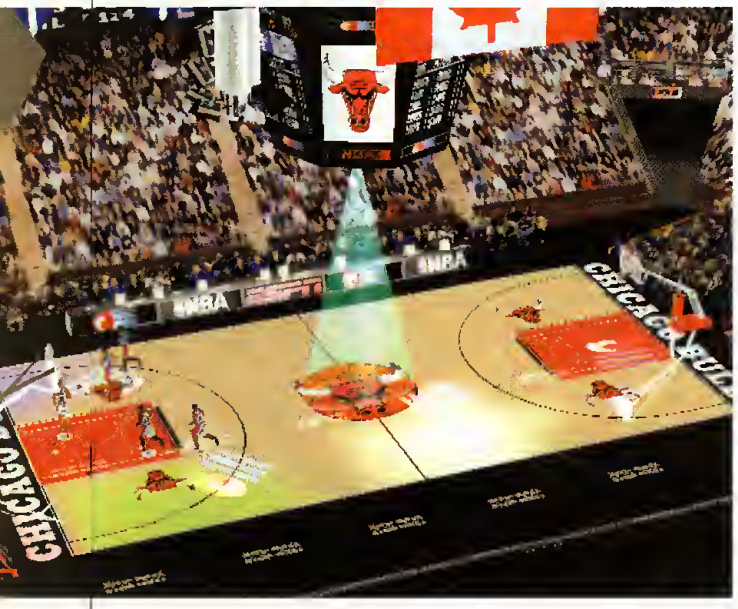
But perhaps the biggest asset of working with ESPN is the potential for using the actual channel. For instance, when the games are ready to be released, ESPN can provide promotional air time. Ribero mentions that both Disney and ESPN are committed as promotional partners, hinting that the games will be visible on more than just the sports channel. "We really can't get into the specifics of the deal," he says. "Let's just say that we will be extremely visible on the network."

With the brand's high visibility, the company hopes to attract more than just core gamers. Armes has encouraged his designers to create a simpler, two-button control system that will enable less experienced gamers to get in and compete with the skilled gamer who's using the eight-button configuration. It will be an option in every game, and the teams have tentatively called it Dad Mode, reflecting more of the family participation the feature is designed to stir up.

For the sports nuts playing on a PC with an Internet connection, the games will incorporate a real-world sports ticker delivered into the game via push technology. Eventually, with the leagues' consent, PC players will be able to download in-season, real-world stats on players and teams.

As the brand grows, gamers can expect more national pastimes and a racing title or two to appear later. Currently, Radical has no plans to tackle Nintendo 64 and will continue to develop action games, with titles like *Jackie Chan Stuntmaster* in the works.

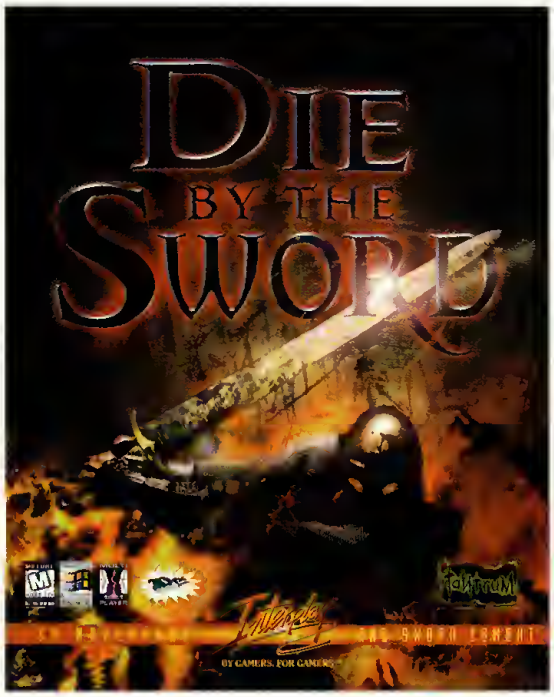
In the end, all the TV ads in the world won't move lousy products — a harsh reality not lost on Radical. "We have to make the best game," Ribero explains. "We have to go head-to-head with the EAs and Sonys, and it takes a level of confidence to say that. Finally, I think we're there."



The game will capture the spotlight introductions and varied arenas of the NBA, but don't expect to see Latrell Spreewell on the box

Catch the Buzz

Posted by Jox on February 25,1998 at 15:33:37: **The Mona Lisa of dungeon-hackers...** I must say, this was **an AWESOME game!!!** Your **miraculous VSIM technology** is one of the most break through things I have ever seen in computer game technology!!!!! **NO** motion capture! **NO** key frames!! **WWWWOOOOOOWWWWWW!!!!!** Posted by Mino (SI) on February 25, 1998 at 14:54:07: I was playin DBTS and **I gotta say - brava! it kix same serious ass.** I especially love mutulating corpses. Posted by FragasM on February 25, 1998 at 11:30:00: **This game is outstanding. I will be waiting in line to buy it.** Wish the demo was longer. ::sniff:: Posted by Imajedi on February 25, 1998 at 09:53:31: **Die by the Sword kicks ass.** I have managed to play the demo and damn its fun....who wouldn't like to play a game in which a can **chop off multiple body parts** and after you kill the enemy you can mutilate his/her body??? Ohh well as soon as i get the $$$$ **i'm getting this game.** Posted by The Lord Humongouson February 25, 1998 at 01:32:44: **THE GAME TO END ALL GAMES!** Finally, after months of waiting, I get a taste of the adventure mode. I **NEED MORE!** This has got to be **the best, most addicting game I have played** in years. I remember first hearing about the concept and how the developer had wanted to make a game that had "Bilestoad" game for the apple lone ofmy alone got me **dying to play this game. ASS.** I **WANT IT NOW NOW NOW!!!** 1998 at 10:57:35: DBTS -- what I have **have been waiting for since I was** equipment and breaking out broom hat of the best of the D&D quests. March 01, 1998 at 02:56:16: Swinging **demos none stop, tis a brilliant** March 01, 1998 at 16:25:57: **Die By The surpassing this masterpiece :)** e-mail: inferno@voyageor.co Posted by definotly psycotic hmm.. so getting **fer to jump and crouch a whole lot, hurt, cus I rule some sweet muffins) by ripping the kabald to pieces, limb** 0800, in comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.rpg **VSIM** engine in Die By The Sword is **ing code** I've ever had the pleasure to swords in your spare time? Well, for those Jordan Thomas http://ovault.com On Wed, comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.action



Now Available

have to admit, I was wondering about this demo until I installed it and found the following four things: 1. **The movement ability of your character is great!** 2. Running over the bridge and getting snared in the rope and hanging upside down and **STILL FIGHTING** (at least until I got my head lopped off!). 3. The only thing that was better was when I beat two enemies while still hanging upside down! 4. Getting my leg taken off at the knee and still hopping around on one foot! All I could think of was the Holy Grail! **I think this just entered the wish list category!!** Rick From blabla97@aol.com Sun Dec 07 14:01:09 1997, comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.action, Subject: Die By the Sword Demo **I really liked the sound affects.** When my knight would land a hit he would say things like "you fight like a Kobold!" The Boar had tons of wierd grunting noises. The music from the menu was really good, and if the in-game music is that good, i will **LOVE the game.** I have a P133 w/ 48 MB RAM and no 3d acceleration, and the game ran reasonably well with pretty good graphics. I would **definitley keep an eye out for this one.** Fromkroberts@bellsouth.net Sun Dec 07 14:11:45 1997, comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.action, Subject: Re: Die By the Sword Demo_ **The control is great,** the only way to go IMHO is to use the mouse VSIM option. **The graphics and character animation are both excellent. The frame rate was butter smooth.** If the quest mode (not in demo) is as good as the arena combat, I think this will be one of the **best games of 1998. Check out this demo if you get a chance.** Taken from Usenet and DBTS message board.

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Slave Zero

Accolade takes the slower aspects out of the giant mech game, infuses it with fast action, and drops it into a living city. Can the game live up to the scale of its characters?

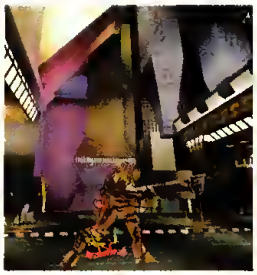
This giant biomechanical war machine is called a Slave: a 600-poly model, scaled to stand six stories tall in this futuristic world

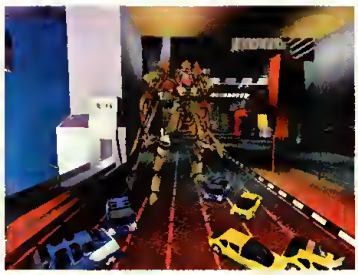
As game programmers tap into ever more powerful consoles and PCs, it remains the task of the designers to match that power with ever more creative and visionary gameplay. Certainly one way to innovate is to cross-pollinate genres and borrow play-tested elements from other games. Accolade has taken this genre-stretching philosophy and the latest technology by the horns in *Slave Zero*, its latest sci-fi action game.

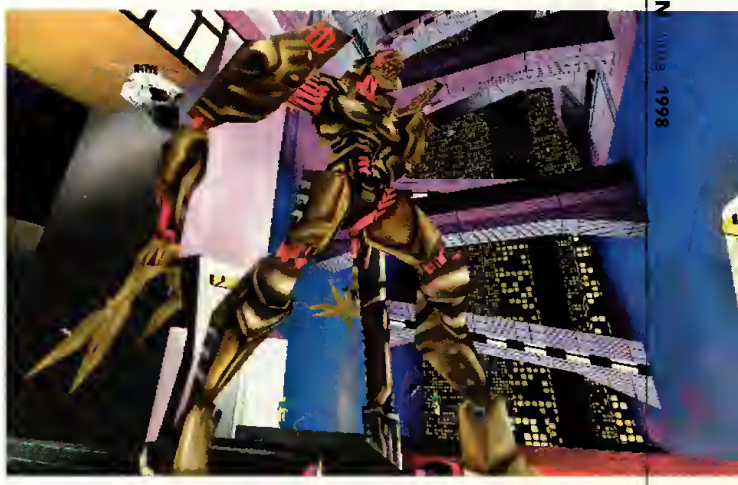
In this third-person action title set 500 years in the future, players are in control of a stolen, six-story biomechanical robot called the Slave. They must pilot this mech through six city stages (25 plus missions) to dismantle an evil power source.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Accolade
Developer:	Accolade
Release Date:	Spring 1999
Origin:	U.S.

Most of the action will be viewed from this third-person perspective (above). The engine uses new sorting code that keeps fogging to a minimum



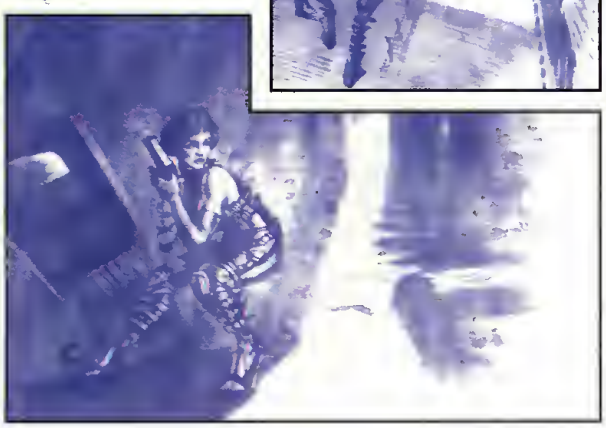




Elaborate architecture (right) is more than just background filler, as the Slave will eventually be able to scale many of the city's buildings

"Essentially," says Lead Designer Sean Vesce, "the main guys you fight are these sentinels, which are more traditional, mechlike robots. Like you, the bosses are other slaves, but in various stages of mutation."

Having been the lead designer on *MechWarrior 2*, Vesce knows his giant robots. "But we're taking a much more action-oriented approach to it," he says quickly, stressing that the game will not fall along the lines of the many strategic-play mech games that have gone before. "We're taking the grammar that's been established with giant robot games, which are more sim-based, and trying to cram that into an action game. We're constantly having discussions about whether or not we should have a radar. We've taken every element of giant robot sims, and we're trying to say, 'What is the action version of that?' And if there is none, then we get rid of it."

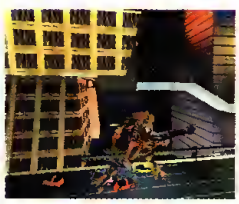


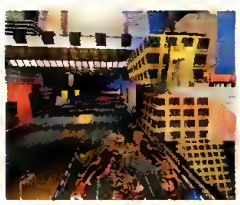
Vesce's vision is a graphic one. It's the shooting action of *Quake*, the futuristic cityscape of *G.Police*, the level of character detail and exploration depth of *Tomb Raider*, and the total destruction of a living city found in the classic *Rampage*.

"We're trying to make use of the third-person perspective," says Vesce. "You can imagine being a 60-foot-tall robot jumping, grabbing onto the side of the freeway, and pulling yourself up on top, climbing on the sides of buildings, and all this while you're fighting."

With only a small cityscape test area level playable when **Next Generation** visited Accolade, Vesce says the environments will eventually range from giant slave factories to labyrinthine sewers. All the while, the game will have to consistently keep the scale of the giant machines balanced with the game's population of tiny NPCs — something no true 3D game has yet done. "It's really challenging, scaling the player's character in relation to the city, scaling the enemies and the distances," Vesce says.

In fact, Vesce believes it to be the biggest design challenge the team faces. *Quake* closed players in, he notes, and even when an enemy was 40 or 50 feet away, it could be on top of a player in a second. The *Slave Zero* team wants players to see their characters coming and hear their thundering footsteps. In effect, they are building a game version of an anime movie, a feat attempted (though





With such elaborate levels, a 3D card is mandatory

The low camera emphasizes the scale of the Slave, notably having crushed several cars and stopping all traffic

never fully realized) in Sega's coin-op robot fighter, *Virtual On*.

Anime is one of the sources the artists have drawn inspiration from "to get something that was more action-oriented," explains Lead Artist Ken Cappelli. "We don't want to have these giant things just sort of chunder around. We want to draw on the influences that are around for things that are more organic, more dangerous ... If you see one of these coming at you, but it's like leaping and rolling and running at you really quickly, it's a lot freakier."

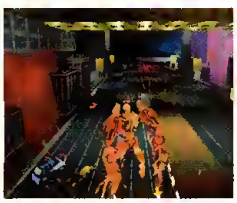
To bring it to life, the Slave is being hand-animated along with the other large cast members for a more stylized range of motion. Early test animations suggest the team has the talent to keep things moving with fluidity.

To keep things running at the required 30fps in the rich world that's planned, serious hardware will be required. Since the game will not be available until 1999, Producer Matt Powers estimates *Slave Zero* will require a P200 with 24MB RAM and guarantees it won't run without 3D hardware acceleration.

A team of four programmers has designed the engine and tools, which enable them to directly import the work of animators and designers from 3D Studio MAX. While this is becoming standard with many new engines, it is noteworthy that the engine doesn't use the standard BSP model typical of most 3D games (including *Quake*). "BSP is really a holdover from the software renderer days," says Programmer Jack Ritter. "People are still using it even with hardware platforms. We're using another recursive spatial division technique that doesn't require splitting polygons." In essence, the technology allows for the fast removal of hidden polygons. The result is a smaller processor hit, which in turn enables the team to animate many more of the smaller objects, such as the cars and people.

Powers is already promising 16-user multiplayer games and plenty of visual effects for weapons. Dynamic shadows that change with different light sources, specular highlighting, and environmental reflections from glass buildings may also be included in the final version.

Regardless of the eye candy, the commitment the team has shown to bringing an original action game to the PC makes *Slave Zero* worthy of anticipation and underlines Accolade's continued dedication to providing new spins on established genres. ng



A segmented animation system means blown off limbs will keep twitching

People, cars, and helicopters are already part of the living environment

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Giants

From the makers of Shiny Entertainment's *MDK* comes Planet Moon, a new development studio aiming to do things a little differently. **Next Generation** has the exclusive on the studio's first game

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Interplay
Developer:	Planet Moon
Release Date:	Q4 1998
Origin:	U.S.

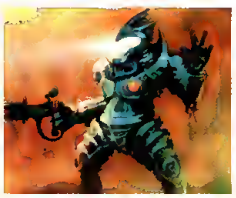
There are three main species of combatants in the world of *Giants*, but smaller animal forms are also found — and often eaten

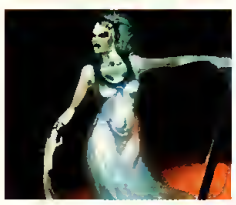
Star development teams everywhere are going it alone these days. A trend pioneered by such luminaries as Sid Meier, Chris Roberts, and Peter Molyneux (and formalized with the Gathering of Developers) has the game industry's top creative talent freeing itself from the shackles of company ownership and claiming independence. Ironically, the man who started this trend is the latest to be hurt by it: Dave Perry, who left Virgin with a handful of colleagues in 1994 to form Shiny Entertainment, watched his core creative talent walk out the door late last year. Now, the company formed by the defectors, Planet Moon, has a deal with Interplay and is ready to showcase its first game.

Giants is an arcade-style, 3D, over-the-shoulder shooter with a couple of twists. "The idea stemmed from taking three completely different characters and having them interact together," says Nick Bruty, co-director of art and design. "Most of today's multiplayer games offer players identical or very similar sides. We wondered what it would be like to pit, say, a giant against a platoon of space soldiers." That's how *Giants* got started. "When dreaming up a new project, we always start off with an idea that sounds amazingly cool but is just stupidly difficult to realize," says Bob Stevenson, co-director, with Bruty, of art and design. "But then we're stuck with it, and we just have to keep working until it's done."

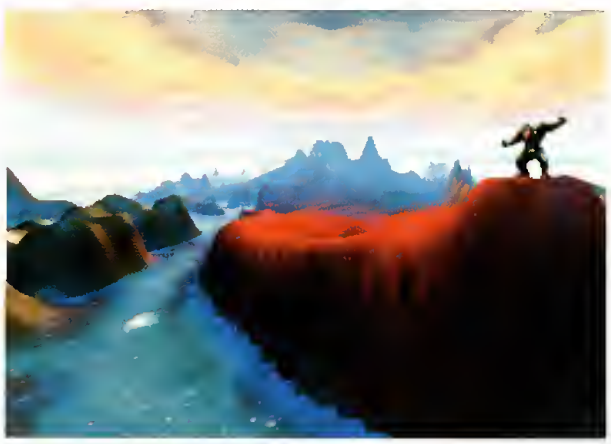
Thus players can be one of three very distinct species fighting for supremacy in a lush, Eden-like island — the game world of *Giants*. First, there is Kabuto, the fearsome and solitary giant. Second, there are the Sea Reapers, women forced by fear of Kabuto to live offshore in huge boats. Third, there are the Meccaryns, a high-tech band of traveling space soldiers, marooned in the island's orbit with a crippled ship in dire need of repair. Each species dominates its territory: land, sea, or air. Each species has both weaknesses and strengths in combat. Each species wants the others dead.

Obviously, *Giants* is designed with





Thanks to its Shiny experience, Planet Moon knows character design



The ethereal quality of *Giants'* world is a far cry from the dark look of the developers' previous effort, *MDK*. A fast 3D card is essential

Each of the three species dominates a particular part of the world — land, sea, or air. The Meccaryns, with their jet packs, rule the air

three-player combat in mind. But the Planet Moon team insists that the single-player mode will offer equally rewarding gameplay. "A lot of games can't make it as both a single-player game and a multiplayer game," says Stevenson. "They are good at either one or the other. And recently, a lot of games have been designed predominantly with the deathmatch mode in mind. We've come from making *MDK*, a single-player experience, and so we're coming at this from the other way around."

To achieve their goal, the developers are working on the multiplayer mode first, observing what tactics are best for each species when under human control. They will then translate these tactics into computer AI. Bruty is confident that lessons learned from *MDK* will help. "With *MDK* we had to restrict the playing environment because of graphical limitations," he says. "But this had the knock-on effect of making the enemy AI virtually impossible to get right. We'd give the enemies a little bit of smarts and then spend the rest of our efforts programming patches to stop them from running into walls or getting stuck in corners. *Giants*' world is a lot more open."

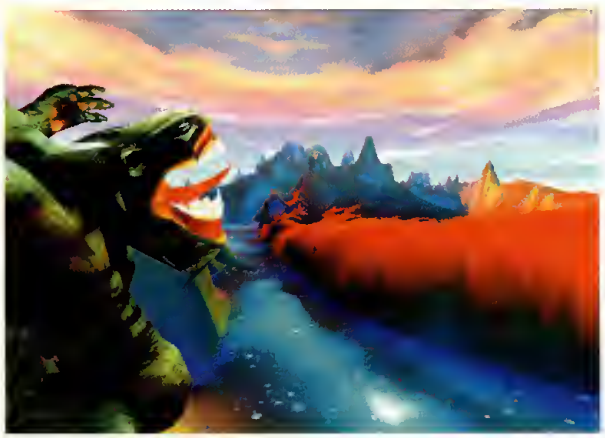
Mirroring the human tactics employed in multiplayer mode will also affect the gameplay of the single-player game. "Typically when you play first-person shooters in one-player mode, there's nothing coming to get you," Bruty says. "There's no threat to you other than when you choose to move forward and start killing off the bad guys. With *Giants* there's a slightly different dynamic because right from the outset there will be other characters hunting you down, and you'll have to get out of the way." Programming Director Andy Astor agrees: "Even in a lot of the realtime strategy games, the computer will just leave you alone to build up a massive force. This won't happen in *Giants*. They'll be on you straight away."

Giants is designed with three-player combat in mind

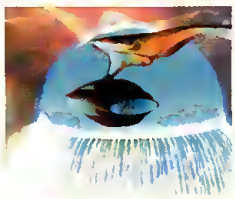
With a whole new graphics engine already in place (the team declined to reuse the *MDK* technology) and an authoring system that lets the artists create worlds without the help of a programmer, the team plans to have its 30 levels finished with plenty of time left for gameplay tweaking before *Giants*' release this holiday season.

"*MDK* was a good benchmark for us," says Bruty. "We feel that we achieved a lot of things, but we're also aware that there are a couple of areas where we fell short a little. Certainly we wished that we could have had more time to polish the gameplay." But Planet Moon's six-person team hopes that *Giants* will stand out from the crowd in this department. "Everyone seems to be focusing on just technology at the moment," laments Bruty. "I was really hoping that the *Quake* genre would evolve and develop designwise, but it seems that all of the effort is going into graphical tricks." Stevenson adds: "We're certainly not designing our levels around what cool lighting effects we may have conjured up."

We will learn more about *Giants*' progress after its official unveiling at E3 this year



The terrain is colorful and bright, painting a picture of the island as a paradise floating in space. And it would be, save for all the fighting



Players ride bizarre modes of transport around the game world

An interview with Nick Bruty and Bob Stevenson

Paul McCartney constantly bemoans the fact that all interviewers ever want to talk about is the Beatles. As alumni of Dave Perry's Shiny Entertainment, the staff members of Planet Moon seem destined to suffer a similar fate — at least until *Giants* gives gamers something new to talk about. Sure, development teams split off and go solo all the time — it's part of the way the game industry works. But when Shiny's *MDK* team members, the heart and soul of Perry's development talent, announced after E3 last year that they were quitting to form their own company, it was the first indication to the outside world that Dave Perry's golden glow just might be starting to fade.

Nick Bruty and Bob Stevenson, co-directors of art and design, talked with **Next Generation** about their decision to quit Shiny Entertainment and form Planet Moon.

NG: What are Planet Moon's goals?

NB: We don't know yet [laughs]. *MDK* was .. a good, solid, safe game to do. But with *Giants* we want to stretch our concepts a little bit further. And hopefully we'll take some of the *MDK* audience with us.

A lot of today's games are very, very one dimensional and very, very simple. You have to turn to something such as *Myst* to find anything approaching a reasonable storyline. This is for a number of reasons. Most games are developed very, very quickly. They're not developed in the same creative way that, say, books or movies are created. A lot of games today start with a financial model; they're designed just to make money. A lot of mainstream publishers always want to take the safe, established path.

NG: So are you heading off into left field with *Giants*?

BS: No, not at all. We are aiming to have big hits. We want to make popular games. We just want them to be a creative success as well as a commercial success, and we know that this is hard to do.

NB: We're lucky that what we like to do is accepted. So far, gamers have seemed to like our wacky ideas. I just hope that this continues.

BS: We want to offer something new, sure, but based on some meat-and-potatoes, hardcore gameplay. The graphics will be more esoteric than the game itself. We went with Interplay for our publisher because we know that Brian Fargo and the other guys trust us. We have 100% freedom to do what we want to do, and we'd have to do something really avant-garde that sold only one unit before they'd start watching over our shoulder.

NB: When we worked at Shiny, David provided this outer shell that we could work inside. He made sure that the outside world didn't mess with the creative process and that we could be left to do what we wanted to do. My greatest fear is that we lose this freedom.

NG: So why risk it? Why leave Shiny Entertainment?

My greatest fear is that we lose this freedom

Nick Bruty, co-director of art and design

The concept sketches show the proposed scale of the game. Note the size of tha giant vs. the size of the soldiers (above)

NB: We made our decision just before E3 last year but kept very quiet about it — we didn't want to be shitty to David. We'd just finished *MDK* and we'd grown up a little bit. We ran the *MDK* project from start to finish; we did all of it, even all the budget stuff, the scheduling stuff, everything. We realized that we were an autonomous team in everything but name. Shiny was just like this other company that we belonged to — that we had to pay to belong to — and it didn't make much sense to be there anymore.

BS: And we wanted a challenge. We were thinking about what we wanted to do next, and we realized that we could probably do our own thing. The second thing we realized was that we didn't want to do it in Southern California, so we moved up to San Francisco.

NG: To what extent will your games suffer from losing the "Dave Perry effect" when it comes to marketing and promotion?

NB: We considered this when we were putting together our business plan. We worked out how much it would cost to make our game, then we figured how many units we could expect to sell minus David's advertising skills. He's a PR magician. That's pretty much what he does now. And we realize that we're going to suffer a little from not having him on our side anymore. We probably won't appear on the front cover of too many magazines. But I think we'll have a better game, and we'll compensate that way. And I'd prefer to do it this way. I'll feel better about myself.

And you know what? I personally don't mind losing some of this marketability in exchange for getting some more of the credit. It's kind of difficult to spend a year sweating blood into a game, then opening the pages of some German magazine to see screenshots of *MDK* with big pictures of David. And, of course, the press always used to focus on him, and it was always part of "the Dave Perry story," the idea that David did everything. And I never thought that this would bother me, and for a long time it didn't. But then, with *MDK*, well, it did bother me. It all adds up over time.

BS: We'll be OK. If you look at the top 10 list of games, most of the titles get there because they are great games. Some of them get there with virtually no PR at all. So it's not too much of a loss. Besides, you've got to remember we worked with David a long time. We've seen him in operation. We've learned some lessons along the way.

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FASA Interactive

After creating a VR combat center, how hard can home games be? Harder than you think

FASA Interactive's CEO Denny Thorley (left) poses with FASA Corp. co-founder and *BattleTech* author Jordan Weisman (right)

Founded way back in 1980 by Jordan Weisman, FASA Corp. has generated a huge fan base with its pen-and-paper *BattleTech* and *Shadowrun* games. It built the first *BattleTech* VR [illegible] center in Chicago in '89, however, until [illegible] a couple [illegible] years ago, the company [illegible] to focus its [illegible] property. There's [illegible] reasons [illegible] of a d[illegible]

[illegible] to Thorley's [illegible] "Jordan and [illegible] from the [illegible] bers. "I [illegible] we need to look a[illegible] is pretty dark, [illegible] the PC, but we're going [illegible] to soften it up for the SNES.' [illegible] we were having pizza at the [illegible] [in Chicago] at CES, he looks

up and says, 'I've got it! You start in a *body bag* — it's all black and the screen unzips, and a coroner is looking at you as he's getting ready to do an autopsy.' And I answered, 'Uh, OK, and if I wanted it *dark*, how would you start it?'" Thorley says, laughing. *Shadowrun* for Super NES went on to become a highly successful and well-remembered game.

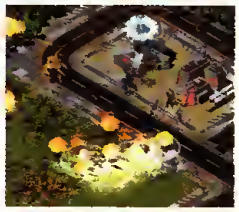
After a short stint at Extreme Entertainment (working on a Genesis version of a *BattleTech* game), Thorley noted that FASA's licensing arrangement with Activision for *MechWarrior* was ready to expire. He approached Weisman with the idea of launching a new interactive division directly out of FASA. This solidified into a publishing deal with MicroProse, and the separate new division, FASA Interactive, was given complete control of the FASA licenses in exchange for FASA Interactive stock. Work began on *Mech Commander* and *MechWarrior 3* soon after — ironically, this was well before Activision's long-delayed *MechWarrior 2* was released.

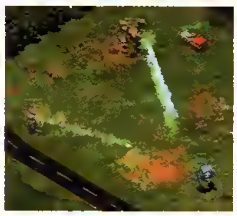
Then things took a bit of a bad turn where *MechWarrior 3* was concerned. "We chose the wrong renderer," Thorley admits. "When this goes into print it's going to look colossally stupid — we chose the Retain Mode renderer. Also, a lot of the infrastructure we anticipated coming over from the location-based *BattleTech* cockpits was problematic going into the Windows 95 environment. If I had it to do over again, we would have home-grown our renderer. We wound up going down a path where we couldn't get the performance that we needed, and ... some of the people working on it were not as experienced as required."

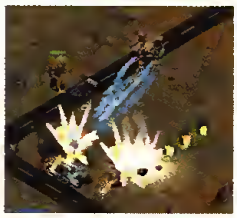
Fortunately, publisher MicroProse had found a developer, Zipper, with a terrific 3D engine, and FI regretfully handed over development. "We had the choice: Do we raise our ugly little baby — which was *really* ugly — or do we hand it over to this mature engine that rocks? Ultimately, we had to decide what was best for the customer."

Meanwhile, however, *Mech Commander* is near completion and scheduled for a late June release. It's a realtime strategy game set in the *BattleTech* universe, but it's as far from a *C&C* clone as one could imagine. Players control a small group of mechs through a series of clan skirmishes, and they must carefully manage their selection of mechs and pilots. The game is unique because each mission can be approached in a number of ways, and there is no set winning strategy.

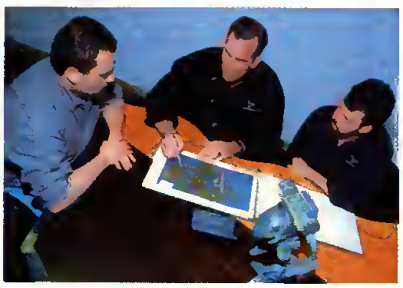
Indeed, when the design team showed the game to **Next Generation**, every FASA staff member in the room,



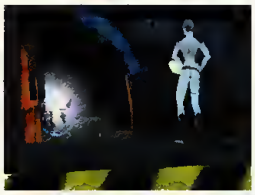




***Mech Commander* boasts smooth animation and units you can really care about**



Thorley works closely with the *MC* team. "This is the first of a trilogy. It's been a trilogy from the very first product," he claims



***Shadowrun: Assassin* Producer Vijay Lakshman (above). This very, very early technology demo (left) gives a glimpse of Solitaire at work**

from programmers to marketing people to Thorley himself, had a freewheeling and enthusiastic argument about the best way to beat each mission that was loaded up. Taunts and boasts were common. For everyone from the top down to show this kind of unbridled giddiness is highly unusual and bodes well for the product, as well as the company.

And yes, Virginia, there will be more *Shadowrun* titles. Currently scheduled for an early '98 release is *Shadowrun: Assassin*, a 3D action/adventure title that is the first of a planned series of *Shadowrun* games, each of which will detail a different archetype from that universe. *Assassin* features Solitaire, a high-tech contract killer with a twist. According to producer Vijay Lakshman, "Her job is not to go out and kill business leaders or politicians. Her job is much tougher — she is trained to hunt down and terminate other assassins."

Again, as in *Mech Commander*, the means of accomplishing each mission or assignment is open-ended. The *Assassin* team is designing each mission from the inside out, placing guards and security systems to genuinely protect the target, not merely to serve as obstacles for a player to overcome. "We're taking the idea of an action game and moving it more into the area of a kind of sweaty-palmed nervousness," Lakshman says. "Not like running in and shooting everyone in this room, but in constantly having to watch out how much noise I make — I'm this badass assassin. I'm supposed to get in as a ghost and get out as a ghost. My mission is only 50% complete once I take the target out — that's when all the shit really hits because then I still have to get out alive!" The idea of stealth is so integral to the game's mechanics, the eventual release will even feature a noise meter.

All the cybergoodies one could expect from a *Shadowrun* game will be at Solitaire's disposal, including cyberware dermal sheaths, shock pulse hands, cyberlimbs, and hand razors. In all, the game will feature 25 weapons, 10 unique to Solitaire, and all pulled right out of the *Shadowrun* books.

But what makes FASA Interactive a company to watch are the tantalizing hints about what it will be up to in the future. According to Lakshman, "The whole ultimate goal is to have this online, persistent universe where people come in and get contracts from another human player and go on runs against corporations being led by humans. That's our ultimate goal." ng

Early concept work of Solitaire, the assassin assassinator

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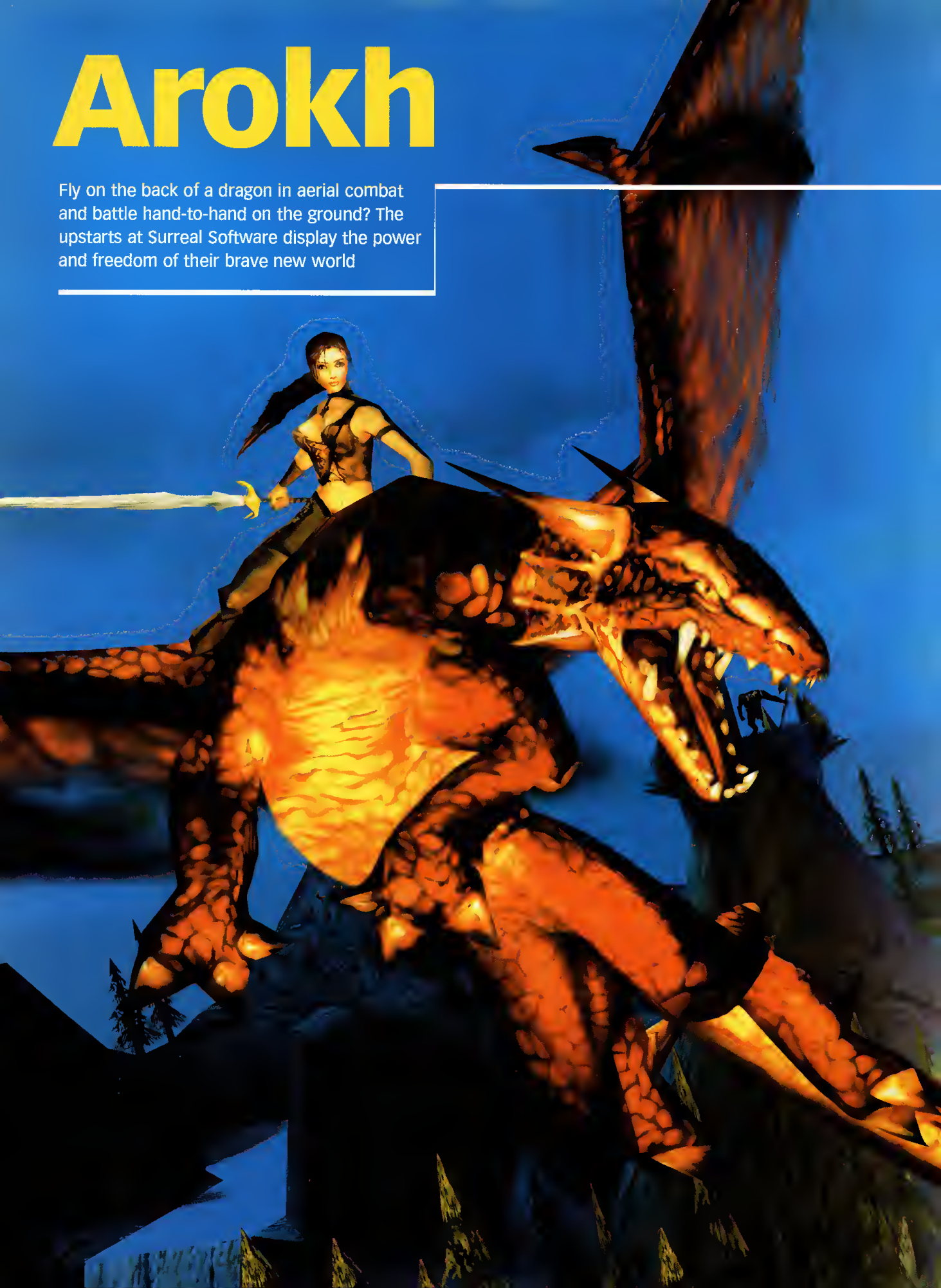
Arokh

Fly on the back of a dragon in aerial combat and battle hand-to-hand on the ground? The upstarts at Surreal Software display the power and freedom of their brave new world



On Arokh's back, the world really opens up for the player, but only half the gameplay takes place in the skies

Combine the dragon-riding action of *Panzer Dragoon* with the hand-to-hand weapons combat of *Die by the Sword*, set it in a richly detailed fantasy world of *Ultima* proportions, and you have *Arokh* .

This first offering from Surreal Software and Psygnosis' new San Francisco studio seamlessly blends ground-based dungeon exploration with high-flying aerial combat.

As the buxom (and typically bare) young warrior Rynn, players must complete 14 missions on a journey across five lands. Rynn is aided by the dragon Arokh, who plays a dual role as both an impressive vehicle and a devastating weapon.

The demo shown to **Next Generation** showed a never-before-seen level of continuity in a 3D environment. The player can run around as Rynn, hacking at wartocs (essentially orcs) with a sword. Yet upon finding Arokh, players mount the dragon in real time, take to the skies, and rain Arokh's fireballs from above — a particularly satisfying experience that left the **Next Generation** staff with an overwhelming sense of power found in few other titles.

Format:	**PC**
Publisher:	**Psygnosis**
Developer:	**Surreal Software**
Release Date:	**Q1 1999**
Origin:	**U.S.**

Devotees of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders* novels will certainly find much to love in *Arokh*, although

Arokh and Rynn encounter some wartocs (top). Standing close to Arokh (right), Rynn is dwarfed by the dragon

ng alphas

This snowy canyon is a perfect example of the natural environments Surreal is capable of — simply stunning

strangely, Surreal Software President Alan Patmore has yet to read any himself. Not unlike a young Richard Garriott, Patmore feels he has an epic story to tell, describing the main quest as one where Rynn must banish the re-emerging forces of the Dark Union, led by an evil wizard long thought to be dead. Beyond that there will be many subquests that players can opt to undertake. Certainly, the adventure and quest elements of the title put it in a realm far evolved beyond Sega's linear Saturn shooter, *Panzer Dragoon*.

On the surface, the dragon riding is undoubtedly the big hook. However, the technology, combined with an impressive amount of design forethought, brings the level of immersion much deeper. The engine, built on what Surreal refers to as "layer technology" (effectively multi-planed bump mapping), yields some uniquely organic environments. Further, the mountains and the caverns burrowed within them already display a very naturalistic look. Since the world is contiguous, moving between an interior cave and an exterior valley is handled with such finesse that the fidelity of the environment is uncanny, even at this stage.

To vary the pace, the player will be called upon to explore cave areas too small for the dragon to enter. This brings more of the traditional "on foot" dungeon exploration to the game. It is also here that the player will be introduced to many of the 25 NPCs, including other equally impressive dragons. Within these dungeon areas the player will find many of the familiar armaments and weapons associated with fantasy worlds.

But more than rewarding the player with a +1 mace, the dungeons are also home to many environment-based puzzles of the kind familiar to *Tomb Raider* fans. There's also a quest element, as the player must retrieve certain hidden artifacts important to the progression of the game. The *Braveheart*-style swordplay enables the player to liberate the limbs of many dungeon-dwelling foes, but not every creature encountered will be hostile. There are to be many friendly NPCs also, which serves the dual purpose of elevating the game above the hack-and-slash nature of the genre, and opening up a number of opportunities for more strategic and engaging play. Patmore is adamant that all of the game's inhabitants will be thoroughly

Much of the first-level, hand-to-hand combat is against wartocs, large beasts who wander the land and control several main dungeons

As in fantasy novels, a strong relationship builds between dragon and rider

Fearsome chimeralike creatures (above left) challenge players in the sky. When dismounted (above right), Arokh will maintain his position until called to an area where he can reach the player and join the action

convincing (the demonstration characters seen by **Next Generation** were already displaying line-of-sight AI), and many will have their own agendas.

Also worthy of some note is the advanced, single-skin, skeletal animation system that enables the animators at Surreal to additionally create incredibly realistic character movement (the scuttling spiders found in one cave gave the **Next Generation** staff a cumulative shiver).

A cutting-edge game of this nature requires a 3D accelerator card. Although *Arokh* will run on a P166, it will run at optimal performance on a Pentium II 233 with Voodoo^2. Plenty of effects still have yet to make it into the game like Doppler sound, weather effects (including wind, snow, and rain), and realtime colored lighting. As is expected of virtually every current PC title, *Arokh* will also offer a multiplayer mode over both LAN and the Internet, though it is limited to eight players.

While Psygnosis has continuously pushed technology in its games, it has also done so at some expense to the actual gameplay (*Tenka* and the recent misfire *Shadow Master* proved as much). But *Arokh* is already far more than an edgy technology demo. Surreal Software may be a fledgling outfit, but it seems well on its way to offering a choice blend of impressive technology and original gameplay that could well yield the first PC hit of 1999. ng

Not only can Rynn use Arokh in aerial combat, but also he can ride a swift-footed Arokh on the ground (above center)

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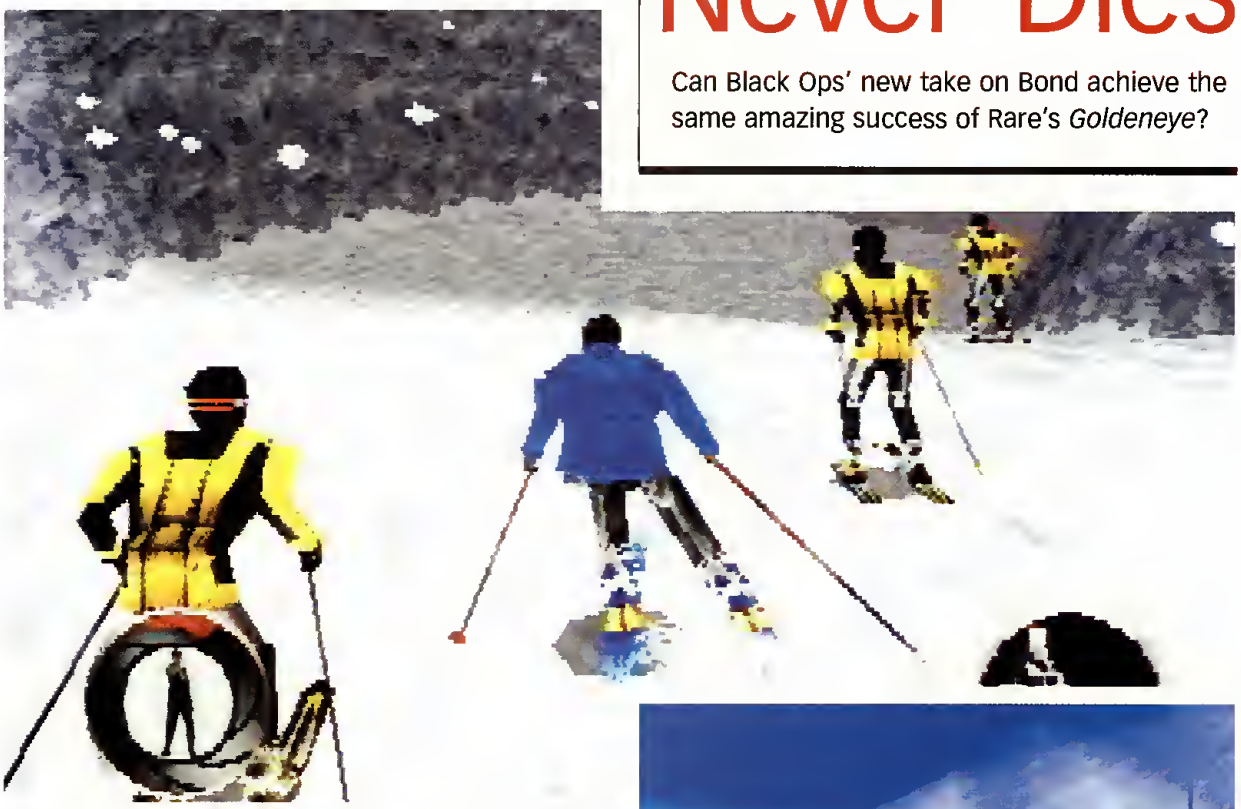
Tomorrow Never Dies

Can Black Ops' new take on Bond achieve the same amazing success of Rare's *Goldeneye*?



Don't count on trying to find this scene in the movie. While the game may share the same name as the movie, the story is entirely different, picking up where the film left off

Living up to the quality of Rare's *Goldeneye* is a challenge — to put it mildly — but Black Ops, the creator of *Black Dawn* and *Treasures of the Deep*, has made that its prime directive. And based on early impressions, the newest addition to the Bond legacy may indeed exceed expectations.

It would have been easy to follow the blueprint of *Goldeneye* — but as **Next Generation** saw in a recent visit, Black Ops' plan is significantly more ambitious. "What's different about our game," says John Botti, president of Black Ops, "is that we enable the player to think and act like James Bond, not only in a running around, sniper style of play, but also on skis, underwater, and in his car." Multigenre games are always a risk, but if Black Ops can pull it off, it will bring players closer to the larger-than-life spy experience embodied by Bond.

Format:	PC/PlayStation
Publisher:	MGM Interactive
Developer:	Black Ops Entertainment
Release Date:	Q4 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Aside from graphic resolution and multiplayer support, the PC (left) and PlayStation (above) versions will be almost identical

The game will pick up where the *Tomorrow Never Dies* film left off, exposing players to an entirely new plot while retaining everything that is stylistically 007. For instance, Black Ops is including three new Bond women. Of course, other Bond trademarks will appear in the game, including realtime interactions with Miss Moneypenny and Q, the masterful weapons coordinator. "It feels like a James Bond movie," says MGM Producer Michael Guttentag. "You can be sipping martinis in a Swiss spa one minute, then jump into a hair-raising car chase the next."

Black Ops is focusing an enormous amount of talent on *Tomorrow Never Dies*, utilizing 28 people divided into four teams, which explains the game's rapid development. Why four teams? The game will have four different engines — one each for driving, skiing, underwater, and on-foot chase scenes. But unlike the kind of episodic design found in *Die Hard Trilogy* for PlayStation or *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire* on N64, the game will utilize multiple engines per mission. For example, in the first level, Bond destroys a target on foot, runs to the edge of a mountain, and (after the activation of a trademark special gadget) begins his escape on skis. **Next Generation** hopes that if a parachute figures into the game, it has the Union Jack on it.

But while stunts like these appear realistic in films, they often look stilted in games. The team chose motion capture over inverse kinematics because it felt that the latter's joint animation was too mechanic. Also, skiers and stuntmen (along with bungie cords and trampolines) were enlisted to ensure that Bond's antics feature the expected level of pizzazz. When a character flies through the air and crumples against a wall onscreen, players can assume that some poor soul did it for real.

A potential disappointment is that one of the finest elements of *Goldeneye* will be missing from the PlayStation version. While the PC version is expected to have eight-player support, console owners will have to be content with a single-player experience. The game asks

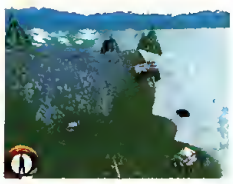
Inevitable comperisons will be mede between this game and *Goldeneye*

In order to give the game the look and feel of a Bond film, Black Ops has creeted scenes like this Swiss spe with scantily cled women

For Bleck Ops, the experience geined from its critically successful *Treesures of the Deep* proves beneficiel for *TND*'s underweter scenes

too much of the aging PlayStation to enable multiplayer, says Black Ops, so the team is concentrating on re-creating the authentic Bond experience.

Whether or not the lack of console multiplayer support will be a critical factor in the title's success remains to be seen. But Black Ops has high hopes — it expects the game to be a major hit, and to ensure its success, the team is already conducting intensive product testing with focus groups. "One of the things [the groups are] asking for is the ability to do tricks when skiing," says Botti. "So Bond can do daffies, backscratchers, and 360s." The nature of the game's design is such that even



The driving sequence hes the quelity of a great racing game, thanks to each segment being developed by focused teams

suggestions made in the 11th hour can be implemented, and adding new Bond moves requires nothing more than a weekend trip to the studio.

In the end, Black Ops is doing everything within its power to give players the James Bond experience, from underwater cars to gunfights on skis. Having MGM as publisher and owner of the Bond property should help. For one, casting services are readily available, and the voice and likeness of Pierce Brosnan will be heavily featured. Also, expect references to older Bond films to be scattered throughout (with the probable exception, of course, of *Goldeneye*).

To many gamers, Rare's effort is everything that a Bond game should be. It remains to be seen whether or not the innovative steps taken in *Tomorrow Never Dies* can convince such dedicated fans that there's more to a Bond license than *Goldeneye*.

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Rogue Trip

SingleTrac's next car combat game isn't *Twisted*. Can the company take critical action to offer more depth?

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	GT Interactive
Developer:	SingleTrac
Release Date:	October 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Taking tourists to exotic locations like Weeny World is what being an automercanary is all about

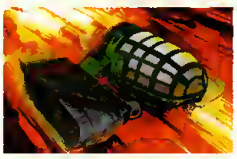
Armed fuel trucks, school buses, and tanks — typical of Washington, D.C.

When it was announced that SingleTrac and Sony had parted ways, the future of the *Twisted Metal* series seemed in peril. Sony has officially announced plans to continue the series, although it remains to be seen whether or not its new development team, the same one responsible for *Rally Cross*, can carry the torch. In the meantime, SingleTrac has gone back to the drawing board and come up with *Rogue Trip*, a game distinctly reminiscent of, well, *Twisted Metal*.

Rogue Trip's formula barely strays from that of *Twisted Metal*, the series that defined the car combat genre as a hybrid of *Mortal Kombat* and *Ridge Racer*. *Rogue Trip* does, however, incorporate new elements that enhance the experience. The goal is to deliver tourists to various vacation spots, such as Area 51 and Las Vegas, for a photo opportunity. Unfortunately, a guy by the name of Big Daddy has monopolized the ruthless vacation industry. As automercenaries, players must illegally transport tourists across Big Daddyland while fending off other automercenaries who want their business.

As for gameplay, it is now goal-oriented (there is still a deathmatch mode, of course). Repairs are cash-based, so the more money players have, the more times they can repair their vehicle. Players earn cash by destroying everything in sight, a practice that often leads to secret areas. Pedestrians are now polygonal instead of sprites, and the environments are much larger, giving players more chases and less standoffs at the beginning of each round.

Players can destroy anything at the airport, including towers and planes



Vehicle designs are reminiscent of the *Twisted Metal* series

ng alphas

SinglaTrac's "sim-toon" models squash and stretch, placing the game's look in a league of its own

Rogue Trip also introduces the concept of sub-bosses and bonus levels, the kind of features normally reserved for platform games. Multiplayer remains intact as well, enabling four players to join in the action with the link cable.

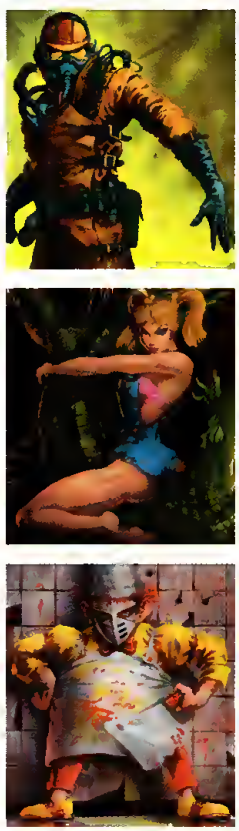
What really separates the game from previous efforts, though, are the advances made in the engine. Cars now move with proper physics, so the movement of the car will feel much more natural. "We're basically leveraging off of our car combat game engine," says Scott Campbell, *Rogue Trip*'s producer. "We're getting 35% to 40% more performance."

This performance increase will be matched by an increase in the AI quality, says Campbell. "The new 'genetic AI' will react as if you're playing against another player instead of just another drone AI," he claims. "It learns from the player."

Another buzz phrase that will come from the game is "Dynamic Interactive Fodder," a technology that allows players to blow up anything in the game. "What we wanted to do was make the environment alive," says Campbell. "We added more fodder. We have helicopters that engage you, blimps, biplanes, jumbo jets, and fuel trucks that in some cases can be used as weapons or are posed as a threat to you." The game also has an all new topography engine that increases the size of each level and enables players to actually drive into the buildings.

Ultimately, *Rogue Trip* looks a lot like SingleTrac's take on *Twisted Metal 3*. It retains the same juvenile exuberence with character names like Fat Texan and Meat Wagon and weapons like the Premature Ejectulator. With Sony's *Twisted Metal 3* and Activision's *Vigilante 8* (which owes a lot to *Twisted Metal*), the car combat genre will be crowded. But, if previous experience plays a role, then SingleTrac can surely expect to be competitive this round.

Multiplayer mode maintains a smooth frame rate, thanks to a new engine (top). Game areas are much larger than in previous games (above)



SinglaTrac's signature character designs are back in full force

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LAPD 2100

Originally conceived as a *Strike* game, *LAPD 2100* brings the best from the series into a futuristic world of action

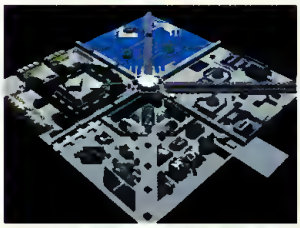
Although not everything in the world is destructible, enough of the structures can be annihilated to please even the most kill-happy player

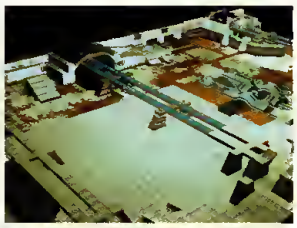
Format:	PC/PlayStation
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Electronic Arts
Release Date:	Q4 1998
Origin:	U.S.

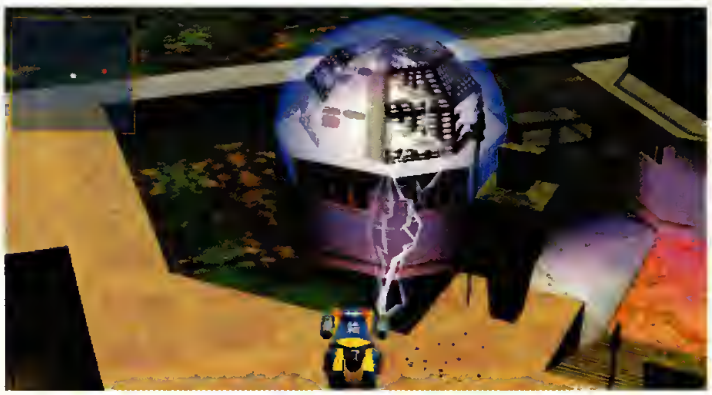
The *Strike* series has been EA's premier nonsports franchise for nearly a decade. So when the company decided to do a new action game, it was no surprise that the creators initially tried to set it in the near-future *Strike* universe. "We thought we could enter the *Strike* world," says Producer R.J. Berg, "but we wanted a mech combat vehicle as the central character, and that kept pushing us out in the future." In the end, the team abandoned the original name, *Future Strike*, in favor of a title that implies a more speculative vision of future technology.

The end result is *LAPD 2100*, which puts the player in the role of a beat cop of the future, who rides in a transformable mech/hovercraft. The job? Take out a series of 12 to 15 crime lords, each of whom controls a large section of Los Angeles with a private army of goons. To earn promotions, players must perform more standard police duties, from thwarting kidnappings to ticketing jaywalkers.

The legacy of the *Strike* series is felt in some elements of the design, namely the incredibly large and detailed environments and, importantly, the isometric view. "There is a raging controversy among players right now,"

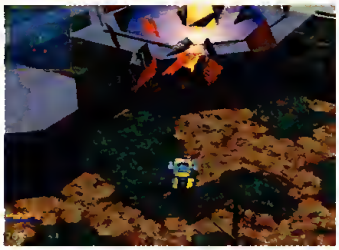






Energy discharge beams add to the game's effects (left). The levels are massive (top right)

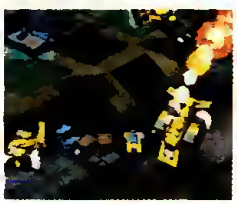
Bosses (above) should be fairly tough. Note the red targeting beam emitted by the head of the walker. More games could use this feature



says Berg, "some of whom are really into that first-person *Quake* view. But that really makes the universe small." Instead, the team opted to make the levels huge and provide adjustable views — a big improvement over the 32-bit *Strike* games, which many complained had too small a field of view. "I hope players will use the classic view to play, where they basically see a whole city block and then zoom in as they run into puzzles." Locking the game into an isometric view also eliminates draw-in issues on the PlayStation and lets the team concentrate on populating the world with as many objects as possible, including snipers, enemy vehicles, and machine gun turrets.

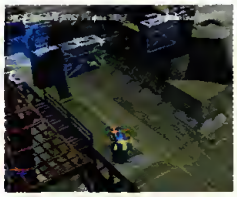
The environments, which feature persistent damage (including bloodstains), are designed to facilitate combat. "Everything is combat-based," says Berg. "These aren't puzzles in the sense of high strategy." For instance, players may need to shoot down a bridge to create a ramp to a better firing vantage point. "The puzzles exist," says Berg, "to move you on to more combat."

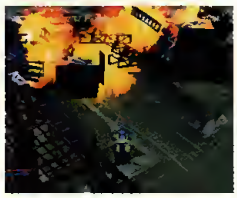
One of the most important elements in a combat game is keeping the action interesting. From a graphics perspective, the team is on the right track, with some of the best explosions **Next Generation** has ever seen. Explains Jeff Lee, associate producer: "Explosions are a big part of the game and its weaponry. They're the immediate feedback when you kill something, and we want them to



The PlayStation fire effects are some of the best we've seen

The concept sketch of the hovercraft shows the kind of segmentations we would expect of a giant transformable craft





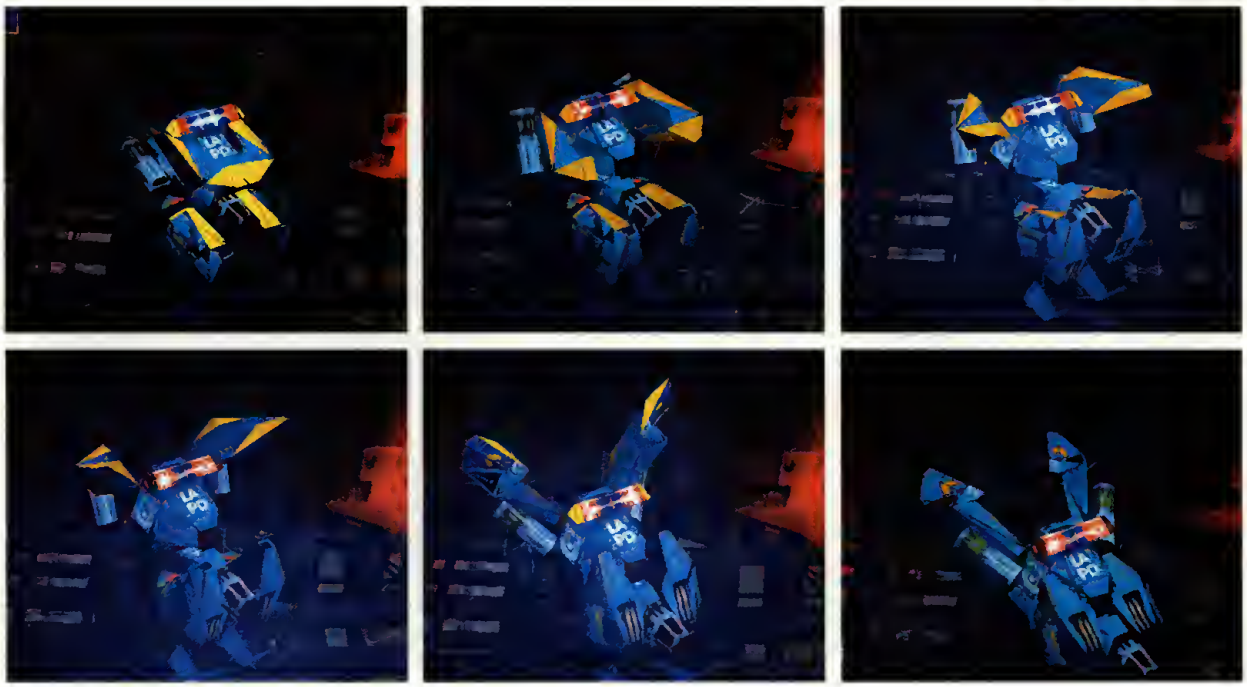
Imagina tha paparwork a real cop would hava to fila after this

be an interesting experience for as long as possible." To that end, the team created each explosion individually. "The explosions are a combination of 2D art and 3D particles — sparkly things flying off," says Lee. "Also, the object itself, all its panels fly off. When we combine all these elements together with lighting, well, with the PlayStation's RAM limit, I can't claim every explosion will be unique, but it will be pretty darn close."

The target-rich environment the team plans to create should also help keep combat from getting boring. Although there will be set pieces to destroy, like turrets, there will also be driving and flying vehicles, as well as humans, to shoot at. "One guy with a rocket launcher may not be able to do much," says Berg, "but when there are two or three, suddenly you need to pay attention." The player's vehicle will feature a targeting laser, and even at this early stage of development, the targeting system works extremely well, as do all the controls.

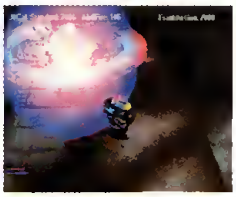
In addition, the combat will feature more than just straight shooting. *LAPD 2100* "is a good opportunity to explore a lot of gameplay styles that have never been utilized in 3D," says Lee, offering the example of a 3D *Star Castle*-style puzzle, in which players lob mortar shells at a rotating shield of concentric spheres that surround the target. Players will also need to switch between the mech and hovercraft modes to complete most levels. The trade-off: The hover is faster (and can go over water), but the mech's control is more precise. Berg says the team is considering adding a tank mode too, but he isn't sure if the final game will have room for it.

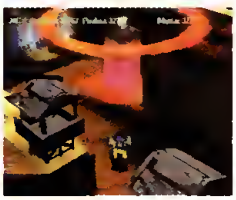
Tha mech's haad tracks to find targets. Organic motion craatas a raal feeling of character — one becomes very attachad to one's mech



This saquance shows a segment of transformation from the mech (top left) to the hover (bottom right)

Note the particle effects coming off the mech. The multilevel nature of the combat adds needed variety





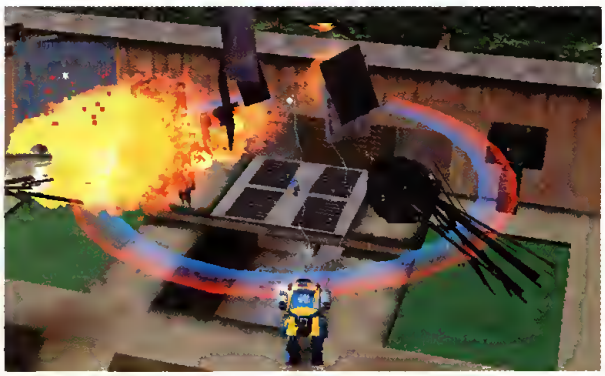
The PSX version features some of the best visuals since *Colony Wars*

Nevertheless, a game with 12 to 15 levels of endless combat might become tedious; EA assures us that the game will have plenty to break up the fighting, including some humorous touches. Expect plenty of visual references to Los Angeles, too. "Burning the Hollywood sign is a bit cliche, but you'll know where you are," says Berg. What should really keep the game from getting monotonous is its unique production design. Although the main vehicle is a mech, it has an organic look and outline. "It's panther- or jaguar-like; it has this agility, and the way the head turns, tracking targets, it really feels like an animal on the prowl," says Berg.

The game will feature a number of multiplayer modes, from cooperative missions (one split-screen, one with a driver and gunner setup) to combat racing to a competitive mode that strongly resembles Sega's classic *Herzog Zwei*. Although the PlayStation multiplayer modes will be two-player only, expect the PC version to accommodate more participants.

It may surprise some readers that while the team is developing the game simultaneously for PlayStation and accelerated PC, it is coding both on the Macintosh platform — a development system holdover from EA's 3DO days (many on the team previously worked on *Shockwave*). Lead Programmer Laurent Benes explains why. "There's less Microsoft stuff on the Mac [laughs]. No, all of our tools are on the Mac, we know the Mac, and it's easier to use an environment you know than to learn another one. And we're lazy [laughs]." The odd choice of development platforms hasn't kept the team from implementing some exciting new technology, though, especially on the PlayStation side, including a colored vertex lighting model. One team member is devoted full-time to graphics special effects.

Overall, the level of dedication and detail in this project, even at an early stage, is extremely impressive. From what **Next Generation** has seen, not only is this team dedicated to creating a high-quality game that does not simply follow the latest trends, but it is also determined to accomplish its vision. Any company can talk about how great its game will be, but with *LAPD 2100*, we fully expect EA to deliver. ng



Unfortunately, screens can't demonstrate just how well everything in the game moves

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Prax War

Can a team of former 3D Realms employees put *Duke* in the doghouse?

These ax-3D Raelms amployaas have takan e lesson from *Goldeneye* — anamias in *Prax* react to diffarant hits with spacific animations

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Rebel Boat Rockers
Release Date:	Fall 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Another first-person shooter by yet another spin-off of another Texas-based studio known for first-person games? Yup. But any company that can bring any sort of innovation to this point-and-shoot genre deserves, well — a shot.

Rebel Boat Rockers and EA are already on their way to bringing a few new elements to the first-person market, as well as bringing some old ones back. "In some ways we're trying to go back to *Doom 2*," says Electronic Arts Associate Producer Gary Gettys. "There was immediate action all the time, and there was a suspense that came from smart level design and [having] good enemies at the right locations."

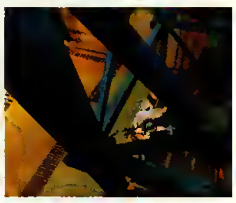
Certainly this kind of pacing would be futile without a competitive, cutting-edge engine. According to Gettys, the *Prax* engine can handle high-poly characters and render both indoor and outdoor environments extremely well. The engine requires hardware acceleration and probably a P200 machine at minimum, but Gettys feels it should be comparable to the *Quake 3* and *Prey* engines.

Set in the near future, the player's special forces squad must stop megalomaniac scientist Nathan Prax, whose revolutionary new energy source has given him command of an army of mutants. The game evolves over 15 episodes, which breaks down to between 40 and 50 levels.

While the game features a story and focus on a cohesive, one-player experience that is reminiscent of Ritual's *SiN*, it also offers players an entirely new experience by adding NPC teammates.

"Nonplayer characters will assist the player and will perform real functions," says Gettys, explaining that numerous voice-overs via the NPCs will help players who are stuck. Beyond that, squad members will operate on their own accord, opening doors and clearing out sections. "They're not gonna just run around taking damage," Gettys reassures.

Despite the success of the genre, EA has never released a first-person shooter. But *Prax War* just may make EA's wait worth the while when it makes its playable debut at E3.



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SiliconGraphics

VR Baseball '99

Can Shiny's *Messiah* technology be the savior for VR Sports?

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Interplay
Developer:	Interplay
Release Date:	June 1998
Origin:	U.S.

The smooth joints ere mede possible by e process called "skinning"

Almost three years after the launch of VR Sports, Interplay may finally have the brand on track. The answer to its problems? Shiny Entertainment's *Messiah* technology.

The first sports game to take advantage of this technology is *VR Baseball '99* for the PC. (Basketball and football games are coming later.) "*Messiah* is the perfect technology for sports games because of its ability to calculate and scale polygon characters on-the-fly," says Alan Pavlish, executive producer of the title "The game is going to look different on nearly every computer because the size of the CPU will determine the detail in the characters. People with high-end PCs and 3D cards are going to get a level of graphic detail that no one else can match."

Pavlish explains the key to the *Messiah* technology is that it enables Interplay to create the players in 3D Studio MAX and turn them into textured characters in the game engine without having to trim away polygons or add new textures. Also the engine's "skinning" technique smooths the joints on the players and enables textures to stretch, bringing better-moving players to the field.

The demo witnessed by **Next Generation** displayed the engine's flexibility. Ballplayers positioned farther away didn't seem to lose any polygons while the animations remained smooth. Meanwhile, the players in the foreground were the most detailed polygon players anywhere, a feature that should keep VR Sports competitive with the heavy hitters.

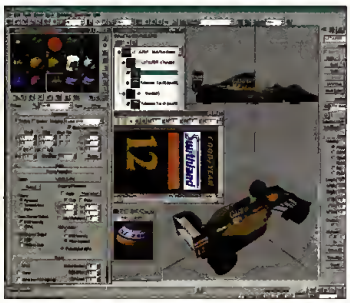
The new engine instantly gives *VR Baseball '99* a better look, but with all this focus on technology, has the gameplay been forgotten? Matthew Findley, director of sports development, believes the company has always had a good game but that it was obscured by poor graphics and a bad frame rate. But leveraging the AI, stats engine, and motion capture from the PlayStation version has given the team more time to polish the nuances and build a new simulation engine for the PC version.

Even if *VR Baseball '99* is finished as promised, there is no guarantee that it will take a top market spot. But with the *Messiah* technology, the company may start producing high-quality games that stretch both the technology and gameplay — something Interplay needs to do if it ever wants to be a contender. ng

The scaling polygonel engine of *VR Baseball '99* provides e high polygon count on images closer to the camera for maximum visual appeal

Interplay is hoping the *Messieh* engine will better showcase whet it calls "... the most reelistic besebell geme enywhere"

MAX Power



Kinetix 3D Studio MAX - Newfire Catalyst

NewTek Lightwave3D - Microsoft SOFTIMAGE

Caligari Truespace3D - Lightscape

Nichimen Graphics N-World

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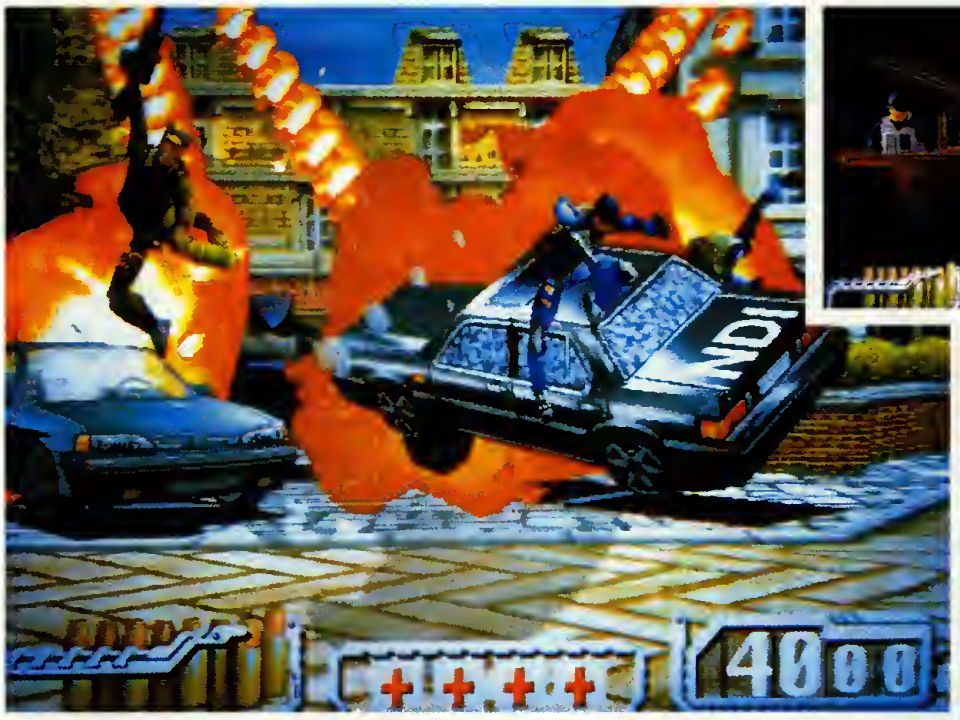
Milestones

An inside look at today's hottest games on the brink of release

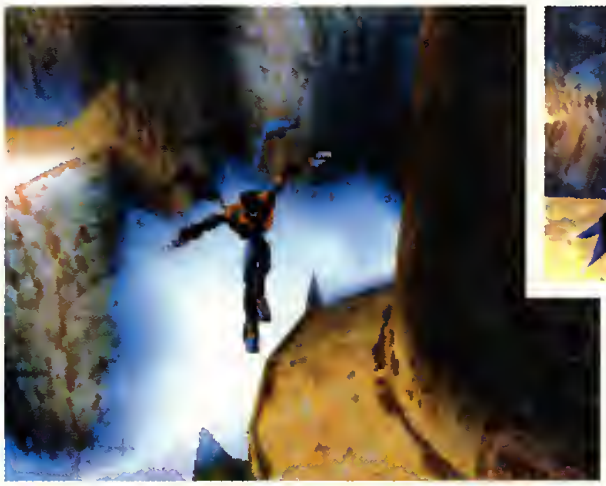
Welcome to Milestones, the newest addition to the Alphas section. In this inaugural edition we see some sequels that should offer more than "more of the same" in *Time Crisis 2* and *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver*; another classic updated by Activision — this time *Asteroids*, as well as a new report on a game some people gave up for lost — Looking Glass Studios' *Dark Project*. We created this section in response to reader feedback to enable us to offer more information on more games. Let us know what you think. As always, our email address is ngonline@imaginemedia.com.

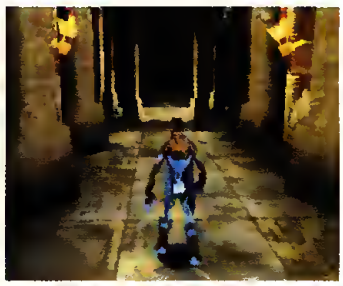
Time Crisis 2 **Arcade**

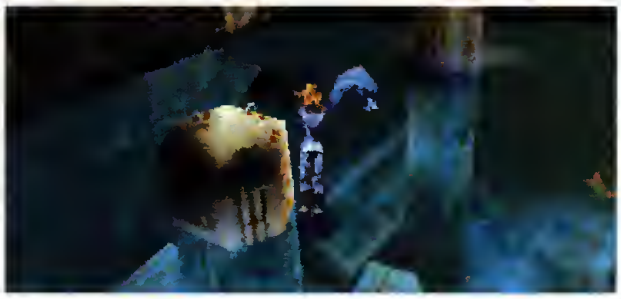


Last year's *Time Crisis* introduced a new control mechanism for ducking and evoiding gunfire. *Time Crisis 2* goes one step further, edding en extra monitor for two people to pley the same geme from two different perspectives simultaneously

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver PlayStation

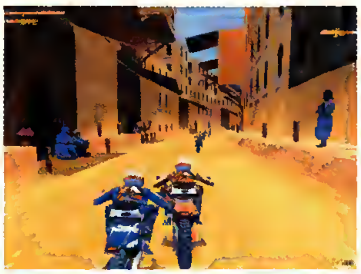






Crystal Dynamics returns to tha dark world of Nosgoth, this time in 3D. As in *Blood Omen*, pleyers must prey on living creetures for survival. *Soul Reavar* will have more in common with Nintendo's forthcoming *Zelde 64*, though, then its previous incarnetion

Moto Racer 2 PC/PlayStation

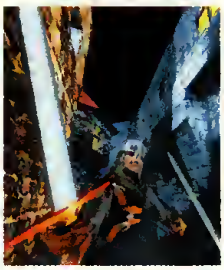


Oelphine's *Moto Racar* survived the BMG fallout to go on to achiava amazing multiplatform success (see NG 41). The sequal promisas avan more action spreed ecross eil new exotic locations. Playars can also axpact tha same kind of terrain veriety thet mede the originel so anjoyebla, with a few naw twists thrown in

Shaolin

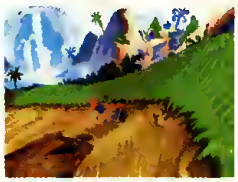
THQ's PleyStation fighter is the first to pit one or two playars against up to six other computer opponents in trua 3D

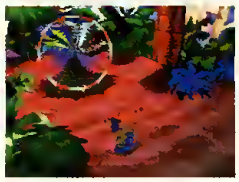
Thief: The Dark Project PC



Stealth as well as force is necessary to match wits against Looking Glass Studios' new first-person adventure

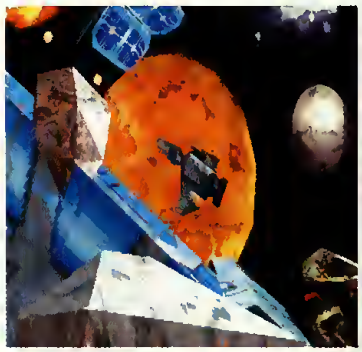
Psybadek

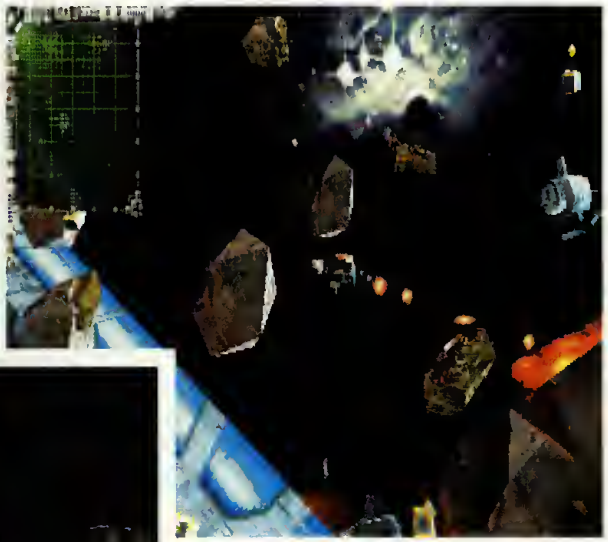




With so many snowboarding games available, Psygnosis' latest take on the genre for PlayStation is a refreshing change of pace

Asteroids PC/PlayStation





Activision's amazing update to *Battlezone* will be followed by yet another Atari trademark, *Asteroids*. If these early screenshots are any indication, the updated version will introduce a new angle to the rock-blasting phenomenon

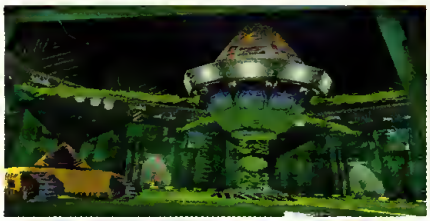
XCOM: Interceptor

The hit PC *XCOM* series makes the smooth transition from turn-based strategy to free-flight combat

Buck Bumble Nintendo 64

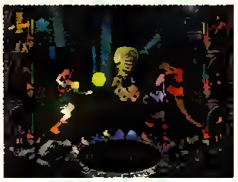
From tha makers of the original *Star Fox* comas a bizarre gama that plays a lot lika *Panzar Dragoon* but stars a bee named Buck. Argonaut's engine delivers an experience reminiscent of the film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*

Recoil PC



Virgin Interactive proves that it is still alive with *Recoil*, dispensing with the resource management of *Battlezona* to make room for fast-paced 3D action

Sword and Sorcery



Virgin Interactive's new PC RPG enablas players to control six characters in a world teeming with classic fantasy monsters

Vigilance

SegaSoft's much hyped PC action game proves there really is life after *Goldeneye*

World Cup 98

Electronic Arts delivers yet another soccar gama for PC and N64. Surprisingly, it's a vast improvement

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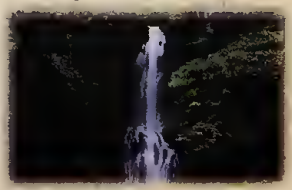

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1. Would you consider yourself a fast runner? ❑ yes ❑ no
2. Have you ever been exposed to encephalitis? ❑ yes ❑ no
3. Does the sight of blood make you feel queasy? ❑ yes ❑ no
4. Can you swim? ❑ yes ❑ no
5. True/False: Wood floats. ❑ true ❑ false
6. Do you fear death? ❑ yes ❑ no
7. How many living members are there in your family? _____ Are you close to them? ❑ yes ❑ no
8. If threatened, would you beat an infant animal with a table leg? ❑ yes ❑ no
9. Do you have any phobias relating to reptiles? ❑ yes ❑ no
10. Which is something you might say:
    - ○ A. Genetic cloning is OK as long as it doesn't involve humans.
    - ○ B. Genetic cloning of humans for medical purposes is OK.
    - ○ C. Genetic cloning is wrong and should be illegal.
    - ○ D. Genetic cloning is a real turn-on.
11. Have you ever shot a gun? ❑ yes ❑ no
12. Are you in good physical shape? ❑ yes ❑ no
13. True/False: Dinosaurs are extinct. ❑ true ❑ false
14. What is the longest period you have gone without human interaction? _____
15. As a child, were you afraid of monsters? ❑ yes ❑ no
16. Do you like sleeping outdoors? ❑ yes ❑ no
17. A velociraptor is:
    - ○ A. A device used to measure velocity.
    - ○ B. A German sports car.
    - ○ C. A singing purple dinosaur who loves you.
    - ○ D. About 6' tall with a hooked toe for ripping flesh.
18. Do you bleed easily? ❑ yes ❑ no
19. True/False: Anything can be used as a weapon. ❑ true ❑ false
20. Do you have a dirty little secret? ❑ yes ❑ no

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The way games ought to be...

In search of the future of gameplay

by **Neil West**

Neil West is **Next Generation**'s editor-at-large

Hamlet on the Holodeck

Janet Murray is a senior research scientist in the Center for Educational Computing Initiatives at M.I.T and teaches interactive fiction writing in M.I.T.'s Film and Media Studies program. She's written a book titled *Hamlet on the Holodeck. The Future of Narrative in CyberSpace* (published by The Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster, 1997, ISBN 0-684-82723-9). It's about how computers offer a new medium for interactive storytelling and how tomorrow's "cyberbards" will create immersive, participatory experiences every bit as compelling as a Shakespeare play, Hunter S. Thompson novel, or Steven Spielberg film. In many ways, it's about the future of narrative forms. And in many ways, it's about the future of videogames.

Murray offers a thrilling vision of where "interactive narrative" is headed, but if you've never studied literary analysis before, you may find it a tad heavy-going. If you're feeling up to the challenge, you should be able to find a copy at your local library (check the media/pop culture section). Or, read on — I've tried to pick the observations and predictions that have the most significance for us gamers.

"The computer looks more each day like the movie camera of the 1890s, a truly revolutionary invention humankind is just on the verge of putting to use as a spellbinding storyteller," Murray says. "Games hold the potential for more powerful moments of revelation than they currently use." She adds, "And although economic and social forces may never move the established game industry far past the lucrative shoot-'em-ups and puzzle mazes, there is no reason why more sophisticated developers could not make stories that have more dramatic resonance and human import to them."

This is exactly what I've harped about in the past. But I've talked about evolving videogames from the ground up; Murray offers the holodeck from *Star Trek* as a goal to which this interactive storytelling technology can aspire. "The holodeck," she explains, "consists of an empty black cube covered in white gridlines upon which a computer can project elaborate simulations by combining holography with magnetic 'force-fields' and energy-to-matter conversions. The result is an illusory world that can be stopped, started, or turned off at will but that looks and behaves like the actual world . . . The *Star Trek* holodeck is a universal fantasy machine, open to individual programming, a vision of the future as a kind of storytelling genie in the lamp. In the three series in which [it] has been featured, crew members have entered richly detailed worlds, including the tribal manor house of the Old English *Beowulf* saga, a gas-lit London street, and a San Francisco speakeasy, in order to participate in stories that change around them in response to their actions."

From this futuristic vision of where interactive narrative could lead us, Murray backtracks and offers her perspective on where we are today. The holodeck is years in the future (if it can ever exist as depicted at all), but the foundations upon which such a device could be built — the first interactive stories — are being created today. "While linear formats like novels, plays, and stories are becoming more multiform and participatory," she says, "the new electronic environments have been developing narrative formats of their own. The largest commercial success and the greatest creative effort in digital narrative have so far been in the area of computer games."

All is not quite well, however. "Much of this effort has gone into the development of more detailed visual environments and faster response times, improvements allowing players to enjoy more varied finger-twitching challenges against more persuasively rendered opponents," she says. "The narrative content of these games is thin, and is often imposed from other media or supplied by sketchy and stereotypical characters. This lack of story depth makes even wildly popular figures like the Mario brothers or the *Mortal Kombat* fighters impossible to translate into successful movie heroes."

She's saying that although videogames offer a glimpse of interactive narrative's potential, progress is hampered by developer's infatuation with graphics at the expense of more involving character interaction. You can see why I like this book! "In fact," Murray continues, "in many maze-based [or fighting] games the story works against involvement in the game. [In, for example, *X-Men: Clone Wars*], in order to make the conflict with the Phalanx the climax of the game, the developers had to come up with a story of futile killing. As in many such games, the *Clone Wars* plot is contained in brief segments of text shown between the maze levels. Many players end up turning the story segments off altogether."

> **"The narrative content of these games is thin"**
>
> **Janet Murray,** author, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*

Not all games are so limited, however, and there are titles that Murray believes show us the way forward. "[Adventure] puzzle games rely less on violence than do twitch games," she observes. "They also have a slower pace of engagement, since the player must figure out how to work the magic lever or where to search for the secret key. [And] although puzzle games can subordinate the story to the gameplay just as the fighting games do, many puzzle games take advantage of this slower pace to offer a richer level of story satisfaction."

So there is hope, but it's indicative of how games have stagnated. Murray's best example of how a videogame can blend a compelling storyline with an interactive process is more than 15 years old. "In playing the early but still lovingly remembered text-based adventure game *Planetfall* (Infocom, 1983)," she offers, "you are a lowly deckhand on the spaceship Feinstein, which is soon destroyed by an explosion. Landing on a mysteriously deserted planet, you must survive long enough to figure out how to get away. In an abandoned laboratory, you find a deactivated robot, Floyd. Once you figure out how to turn Floyd on again, you are no longer alone. Wherever you go from then on within this baffling and dangerous world, Floyd is always there, chattering affectionately, begging for attention, playing with a rubber ball, and eagerly providing information and small services. After living through many adventures with Floyd, you reach the door of the radiation lab that contains a crucial piece of equipment. Inside the room are loud and dangerous mutants. As you stand outside listening to the murderous clamor, Floyd volunteers with childlike loyalty — 'Floyd go get,' he says — and rushes into the deadly chamber without giving you a chance to stop him. After accomplishing his mission, Floyd emerges, 'bleeding' oil, and dies in your arms."

To Murray, this event is pivotal. "At this point the game changes from a challenging puzzle to an evocative theatrical experience," she observes. "The escape from the planet continues, but without Floyd's company the player feels lonely and bereaved. The memory of Floyd the Robot's noble self-sacrifice remains with players even years later as something directly experienced. 'He sacrificed himself for me,' is the way one twenty-year-old former player described it to me. Even those who speak of it less personally ('When you get to that room, he goes in to save you') convey a sense of wonder at the unexpected and touching quality of the gesture."

Murray's conclusion? "The death of Floyd is a minor milestone on the road from puzzle gaming to an expressive narrative art. It demonstrates that the potential for compelling computer stories does not depend on high-tech animation or expensively produced video footage but on the shaping of such dramatic moments."

Next month Janet Murray discusses why, when it comes to the videogames of today and the interactive narratives of tomorrow, it's not what players get to see but what they get to do that's so important (and yes, you have heard that before).

1080° Snowboarding Nintendo 64 **Tekken 3** PlayStation **Die by the Sword** PC **NFL Blitz** Arcade **Battlezone** PC **Gex: Enter the Gecko** PlayStation **Rival Schools** Arcade **Pitfall 3D** PlayStation **Grand Theft Auto** PC

finals

Reviews that set the world aflame

134	Nintendo 64
135	PlayStation
142	PC
148	Arcade

Next Generation's Star Guides provide a quick way to get our general impression of a game. But unless you read the review, you're only getting half the story. To get all the information you need to know before making a purchasing decision, read the whole review; don't stop at the stars.

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high watermark.

★★★★ **Excellent**
A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ **Good**
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

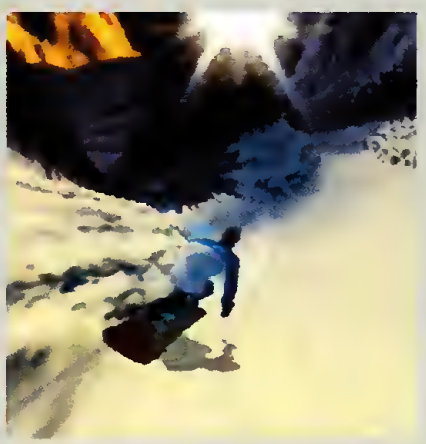
★ **Bad**
Crucially flawed in design or application.

Denotes a review of a Japanese product.

Nintendo 64

Daffy

Does the world really need another snowboarding game? If it's this good — yes



1080° Snowboarding
Publisher **NOA**
Developer: **Nintendo (NCL)**

One of those games that just *feels* right, *1080° Snowboarding* is another N64 must-have

Less than a month after the disappointing *Yoshi's Story*, Nintendo gets back into shape with *1080° Snowboarding* — a game best described as "*Wave Race* on the rocks." While not as groundbreaking as *Mario 64* or *Wave Race*, *1080° Snowboarding* simply does everything just right. From the fast and beautiful graphics to the thoroughly designed tracks, the game delivers the most satisfying snowboarding experience on any system yet.

Developed by a team of Japanese EAD staff led by Shigeru Miyamoto and two former members of British company Argonaut Software, *1080° Snowboarding* features one-on-one shredding on six different slopes for up to two players. Although it was developed in less than a year's time, the game impresses with an exceptional physics model and dazzles the eye with sparse, yet refreshingly sharp polygonal environments. One of *1080*'s main attractions is its stylish realism. Players board over different types of snow, try to keep their balance on icy surfaces, and sink waist-deep into fresh powder.

The attention to detail will surprise even *Wave Race* enthusiasts. Both the Lamar-licensed boards and the riders' hands leave trails in the snow, accompanied by excellent snow spray effects — and the shadow, lighting, and lens flare effects are easily the best on the system. Every stunt or jump rings true, although you probably would be quite dead after jumping a few cottages, catching air off a 50-foot cliff, and landing headfirst on a parked Lamborghini.

In addition to the usual array of racing options, *1080°* expands on the genre with both slalom and trick racing modes that grade successful completion and combination of the more than 20 tricks. Even in the audio department — usually the N64's Achilles heel — the quality of *1080*'s mixture of thrash and hip-hop tunes is exceptional. NCL has obviously abandoned the original SGI sound drivers and is digging deeper into the N64's hardware.

All in all, the excellent feel and wealth of features easily made us cast a charitable blind eye on the relatively low number of courses and occasional pop-up and clipping. With *1080° Snowboarding*, Nintendo delivers another system seller and once again sets the standard for an entire genre.

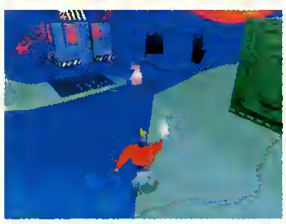
Rating: ★★★★★

PlayStation

Blasto
Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **SISA**

When we previewed *Blasto* (**NG 31**), we said that it was likely to introduce entirely new technologies to the PlayStation. If, as planned then, it had shipped in August 1997, maybe it would have. As it stands, though, there is little to be seen technologically in *Blasto* that hasn't been done already (and usually better) in recent titles like *Colony Wars* and *Einhander*. The team may have had special access to the PSX code library in Japan, but the delays in the game meant that everyone else eventually got those libraries too. In 10 years, when one thinks of technological milestones on PlayStation, *Blasto* will not come to mind. Sadly, the game will probably only be remembered as an example of the truism that marketing can only do so much for a product.

Conceived as a wacky-parody-superhero-shooter, the game seems great on paper — a big, stupid, Tick-like superhero (voice by Phil Hartman), combined with a *Looney Tunes*–style



***Blasto* is great — two years ago. Still, if you'll look to your right, you'll see a game you'll like less**

universe. In reality, however, the game ultimately fails (sometimes spectacularly). The setting is just not that original. We've seen this parody superhero thing before, in Cyclone's *Captain Quazar* (from which *Blasto* seems almost consciously derived). Even the scenery is eerily reminiscent of Accolade's disappointing *Bubsy 3D* (which also went for a *Looney Tunes* look that didn't work).

The gameplay is ultimately unsatisfying, and the difficulty ramps up too quickly. Also, it seems there are too many locations where Captain Blasto can be shot at but cannot effectively return fire. And the way Blasto runs around, with his arm held out the entire game, is both unrealistic and disconcerting — one's arm gets tired just watching.

Even the positives — the impressively huge levels — turn into negatives, as gamers often find themselves running back and forth with no clue where to go. And the huge level size often creates a feeling of emptiness in the game, countering the wacky style the designers intended. We enjoyed some elements — a few of the platform challenges were fun, and it's always reasonably satisfying to find all the secrets in a level (even if they involve ways to rescue the utterly unappealing, downright anti-sexy Blasto Babes).

In the end, despite all the problems, this isn't the worst game ever released for PlayStation, but it doesn't hold a candle to the best, or even the mediocre.

Rating: ★★

Deathtrap Dungeon
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Core**

Imagine *Tomb Raider* in fantastic medieval dungeons. That's what *Deathtrap Dungeon* is supposed to be. Now imagine a game that is, in fact, as far from "*Tomb Raider* in a fantastic medieval dungeon" as possible in terms of quality. That's what *Deathtrap Dungeon* is.

Sure the game is a third-person,

***Deathtrap Dungeon* is one of the few titles that makes *Blasto* look good. Too little, way too late**

over-the-shoulder, dungeon-crawling, monster-killing, hack-and-slash fest featuring as one of its characters a "hot polygonal babe," but the environments are totally boring and repetitive. When you can even see them, that is, since most of the time players merely find themselves confronted by black fog everywhere they look. And did we mention the terribly jerky camera angles that prevent you from paying attention to what the black fog doesn't obscure?

The enemies are from fantasy-casting central and add nothing to the pantheon of game characters. "Oh look, a giant spider! No one's ever tried that before in a fantasy game!" Snore. And although the game is based on Ian Livingstone's work, there is really no story here to speak of. We certainly don't mind the text introductions on principle, but we can't imagine a better way to fail to make an intro immersive than to explain gameplay conventions in what should be a place that furthers the story. Also, having to explain the gameplay is, to us, a symptom that it wasn't carefully thought out in the first place — games should strive for total intuitiveness.

The flaws of this game are doubtless a result of its long development cycle. *Deathtrap Dungeon* was first shown along with *Tomb Raider* (the first one) at E3 in 1996. So, while it might have been OK if it had shipped on time, today, there is no excuse for this. Three-D engines have come so far since *Tomb Raider* that releasing a game with a sub-*Tomb Raider*-era engine is just a tragic mistake. We had a little fun playing this — we like dungeon-crawling hack fests as much as anyone — but the key word here is "little." The flaws in the game continually distracted us from the fun parts. Overall, there are only three words for this game — bad, bad, bad.

Rating: ★

Diablo
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Blizzard Entertainment**

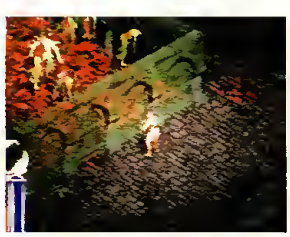
When *Diablo* hit the PC a year ago, it was an overnight success. The lush visuals, captivating creatures, and endless dungeons had many gamers hacking and slashing their way to the source of evil in Tristram — the great Diablo himself. The PlayStation version takes all that was good about the PC version, and with the exception of the graphics, improves the rest.

Navigating your chosen character (you can play a warrior, sorcerer, or rogue) is easier than in the PC version — simply use the D-pad rather than a mouse-click. Similarly, combat is also much simpler — your character automatically targets the closest creature and lashes out at the stroke of a button. The PC version makes you click on an enemy to attack. If your aim isn't true, you could end up walking to a new spot rather than swinging your blade at the offending creature.

The game doesn't have quite the beautiful high-resolution graphics you might see on the PC, but what you get is nothing to sneer at. The game also contains a two-player mode, in which you can battle through the dungeons with a friend watching your back. Of course, that's the whole point of the game — wander the dungeon, kill the monsters, improve your character, and gain powerful inventory items.

All in all, this is a port that definitely benefits from the console overhaul. The interface makes fighting easier, and even accessing inventory and spells at the push of a button is an improvement over the keyboard or mouse commands of the original. If you were addicted to the PC version, you can experience it all over again on PlayStation. And if you haven't played *Diablo* at all, check this one out.

Rating: ★★★★



***Diablo*'s graphics may not be as sharp as the PC version, but the butcher is just as bloody**

Gex: Enter the Gecko
Publisher: **Crystal Dynamics**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**

With the mass march of technological progress being what it is on the PlayStation, it seems appropriate that Gex, the platforming gecko, finally join his mascot brethren, Mario and Sonic, in the third dimension. *Gex: Enter the Gecko* marks his debut as a completely three-dimensional creature trapped in an alternate world strung together by pop-culture-themed levels. Keeping with the humorous nature of the series, Gex is once again up against his former nemesis Rex, who is attempting to overtake all of the world's television channels.

The pop culture and humor elements are by far the game's most distinguishing features. With comedian Dana Gould once again voicing all of Gex's 500 one-liners, it's apparent that Crystal Dynamics wants to ensure that its gecko has been injected with enough personality to make him stand out amongst more mediocre mascots. Levels have been designed to branch off of a central starting area, giving the game a less linear feel. Multiple missions will have you scrambling through some very cleverly executed levels, all packed with colorful characters, painstaking details,

With tons of unique levels and multiple secret areas, players have their hands full with *Gex*

and lots of silly potshots at popular film and television shows. In this approach, *Gex* succeeds in producing enough charm and wackiness to almost compensate for some of the weaknesses of the game's format.

Three-D platformers are still a relatively new phenomenon, with few titles to be compared to. A consistent formula for making camera controls intuitive and unobtrusive has yet to be discovered, and until then, the genre will continue to receive its share of technological growing pains. Movement in a virtual, three-dimensional world will remain problematic and awkward as long as the approach to controlling camera angles evolves. In *Enter the Gecko*, steps have been taken to minimize camera problems by enabling the player to choose between different modes of perspective controls: Automatic, Semi-Automatic, and Manual. There's also a quasi-first-person perspective, akin to the one in *Tomb Raider*, that lets Gex canvass his immediate vicinity up close. The shoulder buttons control the view in the game, spinning a full 360 degrees in order to adjust the viewing angle within the game. Little features like these show that effort has been made to tackle the problems of 3D gameplay. But, unfortunately, effort doesn't count during actual play.

Crystal Dynamics has taken a bold, innovative step into the 3D platform genre with *Enter the Gecko* by providing humor, solid design, and clever enemies, but the gameplay still needs a little time to catch up.

Rating: ★★★

Judge Dredd

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Gremlin Interactive**

As a videogame staple, light gun games are relatively innocuous in that they rarely fail to live up to the preconceived expectations of gamers. Pop-up targets and a gun — it's a theme that finds its roots in carnival game booths. Just how difficult can it be to produce another mildly entertaining videogame based on the concept? Apparently for Gremlin, it's virtually impossible.

The laundry list of problems with *Judge Dredd* is a substantial one, but the problems that top the list are definitely ones of technical execution. Despite some compression-related dithering problems, the high-res, prerendered graphics in the game are relatively attractive. Players are never given the sense of actually being immersed in the game environment as in some of the better light gun games. Instead, the experience is more akin to shooting rubber darts at a television screen — not exactly compelling, but serviceable entertainment if done correctly.

Unfortunately, the developers apparently couldn't be bothered to rent a copy of *Virtua Cop* or *Time Crisis* to see how a light gun shooter should be done, and the gameplay in *Judge Dredd* seems to be mired in a swamp of molasses. Not only do the graphics slow to a crawl whenever the camera view pans across the playfield, but the game is also incapable of accurately and instantaneously displaying the targeting of the light gun — a fatal design flaw.

The well-done technical aspects of *Judge Dredd* are the FMV sequences that lay out the storyline of the game. The sequences are appallingly acted (and the villainous Judge Roy Bean who is featured in them is about as menacing as the average grandfather), but the video compression is superb, and the result is some of the clearest and most vibrant video ever to grace a PlayStation game. Does this help? Of course not.

Even setting aside the game's numerous technical snafus, *Judge Dredd* offers very little in the way of compelling, or even very average gameplay. The basic concept of shooting enemies while trying to avoid hitting innocent bystanders has been done before — often — and better. The final insult is that the game has only four stages, which can be blasted through in less than an hour on easy mode. Each stage has several segments, but some of the segments are so short that it seems as if it takes longer for the level to load than to actually play through. Setting the game on the highest difficulty treats the player to the same levels with the same enemies who now require several hits to kill instead of one, thanks to a "defensive power shield."

But the most bewildering aspect of *Judge Dredd* is that since the FMV shows Judge Roy Bean as the game's ultimate villain, the player naturally assumes that there will be a final showdown with him. What the player is treated to instead is a showdown with a heavily armed mech/robot, with the final confrontation against Judge Bean neatly taken care of in an FMV. Astounding!

Considering the movie license source, perhaps it is to be expected that the game is devoid of any real redeeming value. After all, the only redeeming value of the motion picture *Judge Dredd* was to reaffirm that Sylvester Stallone's career really is over. Still, in an all too common display of galling disrespect toward gamers by the videogame industry, a major publisher like Activision has once again tried to slip a gaming travesty past an unsuspecting public.

Rating: ★

The ewful motion picture *Judge Dredd* is now evelieble es e berely interactive game

March Madness '98

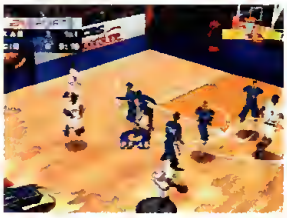
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **EA Sports**

EA returns to the college basketball arena after much time and preparation with an overwhelmingly mediocre game in which what was done well is overshadowed by shortcomings. On the positive side, the game does try to emphasize the best characteristics of college basketball — team play and emotion. A momentum meter is its single original and interesting feature, showing which team is nding the larger surge of emotion at any given point.

"Pass and pop," or catch and shoot, is totally obvious but something that other basketball games have missed. Perhaps the best thing about the game as a basketball sim is its degree of challenge. An increasing tendency on the part of developers to create flashier dunks and more fast breaks than the competition is threatening to derail the sim value of videogame basketball as a whole, and holes in the computer AI can be repeatedly exploited. Not so in *March Madness '98*. Passing the ball to the open man is a must rather than a concession to realism. Even the fastest players can't fly down the court like hockey players and stop on a dime. The AI doesn't make you feel that it's cheating to stay close (as in *NBA Live '98*) — it actually uses sound fundamentals to win.

The game's single biggest weakness is its engine. A modified version of *Live '97*, it simply does not have the horsepower to stand out on the PlayStation. The frame rate of *March Madness '98* is actually noticeably worse than *Live '97*, a puzzling problem that can only be explained by the addition of more frames of animation. The trade-off is definitely not in this game's favor, hurting gameplay much more than any extra frames could help. The overall effect is to render the game sluggish and choppy. Another glaring problem is its inadequate simulation of the NCAA Tourney, the centerpiece of college basketball. The absence in *March Madness* of 24 of the 64 teams in this year's tournament is simply not acceptable. In addition, a result of so-so Georgia Tech routing superpower Arizona 103-69 (which happened in **NG**'s simulation) destroys any credibility. Random oddities such as far, far too many blown lay-ups and goaltending calls, and the computer auto-subbing a 6'3" point guard at center just rub salt in the wound. Die-hard college basketball fans would put up with a lot to enjoy the feeling of being in the game, but they shouldn't have to put up with this much.

Rating: ★★



EA Sports' *March Madness '98* captures the feel of college ball but blows the execution

Pitfall 3D

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Activision**

Gamers' expectations of *Pitfall 3D* may be a little high after its numerous delays. Sadly, the final result can barely answer to those expectations. To begin, the player is immediately presented with an inconsistent barrage of images. The game opens with a rendered FMV sequence, then continues through a series of comic-book-style panels that finally lead to the blocky in-game art and animation. Mix in an unregulated frame rate, and you have a game that makes it nearly impossible to keep track of the main character.

The engine makes no concession to innovation and will remind gamers of such PlayStation anti-classics as *Grid Runner* and *Floating Runner*, in which the game, for the most part, takes place on a series of platforms rather than in a free-roaming environment. The usual trademarks of the series, such as vines and pits, are back, but in a lackluster fashion. First, grabbing a vine is hardly the visual splendor that could be found in the Atari 2600 version, and as for the

continued on page 142

Shortfall 3D* would heve been e more eppropriete title for the disappointing *Pitfall 3D

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Tekken 3
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **Namco**

The *Tekken* series has undergone an interesting evolution from *Virtua Fighter* wannabe to PlayStation standard. Namco is to be congratulated for its excellent handling of the sequels. *Tekken 2* was a great leap forward, and *Tekken 3* makes the same kind of progress. The arcade *Tekken 3* ran on Namco's System 12 coin-op hardware — basically a clock speed and RAM-enhanced PlayStation. Concerns were expressed about whether Namco could successfully port it back down to PlayStation specs.

Compromises have been made, but even the most anal arcade fan would be hard-pressed to identify them visually. The polygon count is lower and some textures have been sacrificed, but Namco has produced a game conversion that looks almost exactly like its parent.

The game is a very conventional 3D fighter on the surface, with multiple selectable characters and a pretty traditional fighting-move arsenal. What separates this from the vastly swollen pack, though, is the artistry and charisma demonstrated by the characters. Each character (even the "free" hidden ones) has a distinct personality and usually a completely original fighting style. Like *Virtua Fighter*, the emphasis here is on the difference between these styles and the strategies this creates between characters. Even the plot, while hopelessly bizarre, adds atmosphere to an otherwise pointless single-player game. To drag the series forward while still appeasing the *Tekken 2* fans,

Lei Wulong is clearly inspired by the movie persona of Jackie Chan, changing from *Supercop* to *Drunken Master* costumes at the player's discretion. A third, alternate costume is hidden in the game

Namco has given us the *Tekken* offspring — sons and daughters fighting side by side with mothers and fathers. It's all very strange, involving family feuds, comedy, and even supernatural elements.

Motion capture for the game was handled in-house, and the company spared no expense in hiring the finest martial artists and gymnasts to supply the motion data. Namco's efforts have been rewarded by some of the most elaborate, realistic, and visually impressive movements ever to grace a PlayStation screen. Grabs, throws, and kicks really appear to connect, and while the overblown nature of the combos and special moves may distress *Virtua Fighter* purists, there's no denying that the game looks cool.

Mastering each character is a pretty Herculean task, with literally dozens of techniques per hero/villain

Namco has substantially built upon the original plot, with Heihachi Mishima's diabolical hand behind everything that transpires. Add to that a recently awakened and utterly evil "God Of Combat," and it's more than enough melodrama for another sequel

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New lighting effects complement the excellent motion capture, ensuring that *Tekken 3* is the most visually attractive fighting game around. Technologically spectacular, in fact

— it's a blessing that Namco once again saw fit to include a training mode. Aside from the sheer number of moves, players then have to contend with defense strategies. Some characters can counter punches and kicks, turning the opponent's strike against him. Others can create a temporary force field, making themselves invulnerable to most attacks. Adding all these factors together gives *Tekken 3* a labyrinthine depth that simply isn't available in other fighting games.

Graphically splendid, *Tekken*'s presentation is quite simply the best yet on a console game. Long, wonderfully rendered intro and closing movies make for enjoyable watching. (Namco will be a force to be reckoned with as its new movie development studio ramps up production. It already has a feature in the works, possibly based on the *Tekken* franchise.) The in-game graphics are just as impressive — again, this looks just like the arcade game. Backgrounds, while generally existing on one or two flat planes, are crisp and well-defined.

Eddy Gordo is already famous as the "cheapest" character in the game. A simple thrashing at the kick buttons ensures an almost eerily efficient victory, but his antics can be countered by good players

As with *Tekken 2*, this third installment offers a lot more options than the theoretically superior arcade version. *Tekken 3* is quite simply packed to bursting with valuable and entertaining options. To name just a few, the first and most notable is Force Mode, a side-scrolling beat-'em-up very much in the vein of *Final Fight*. You can use any selectable character and battle a bunch of generic ninja and their level bosses (other *Tekken 3* characters). Although not much more than an amusing diversion from the real game, playing through the whole thing four times consecutively will reveal a secret character named Doctor B. Graphically limited, this mode uses shrunken character builds to save on processing time. It is, however, interesting and fun.

If eye candy is your thing, then Theater Mode will be a valuable addition. It simply allows you to play the rendered movies at will. End sequences have to be earned by beating the game with the appropriate character, but once that's accomplished, they can be accessed and viewed at any time. This mode also enables you to load movies from your old *Tekken 2* disc and view them at leisure.

Tekken Ball is a hopelessly insane volleyball simulation with equally insane levels of violence. Pick a *Tekken* character and start batting that ball across the center line. You can reach your opponent in the middle and dish out a sound beating, hopefully distracting him from the slow-moving ball. It's possible to affect the ball by using special moves, but don't spend too long exploring this sub game. It's a short, sweet, added attraction at best — ironically better than any other console volleyball game, though.

There's also the by-now-traditional Team Battle Mode. Here you can pick up to eight characters and keep fighting until there are none left. This was also available in *Tekken 2* and provides a very useful and enjoyable alternative to standard two-player matches.

Add to this package some good (if mixed) musical themes and you have the absolute category leader. There is no better fighting game, on this system or any other. It's clearly superior to the previous games in the series and a stunning value for *Tekken* aficionados.

Rating: ★★★★★

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rating

continued from page 136

pits, it's just a matter of walking around them, instead of the clever timing found in the original *Pitfall*.

It would take a lot to fix this game. Foremost, a consistent focus and an entirely updated 3D engine would have helped. Even Bruce Campbell's voice talent is not enough to hide its mediocrity. This game shipped ridiculously late, and it shows. Its level of technology and 3D gameplay simply cannot compete with more state-of-the-art efforts. That all said, many of the underlying gameplay elements are solid. There is some fun here, but the appeal is almost retro — there's nothing in *Pitfall 3D* that hasn't been seen before.

Rating: ★★

Powerboat Racing

Publisher: **VR Sports**
Developer: **Promethean Designs**

VR Sports' *Powerboat Racing* is the first of its kind on PlayStation, and as such, there are a few things that could have been done better.

Overall, the game is well-rounded. There are five modes and nine initial tracks that span the globe. Players can choose from eight boats, each with a different look and feel. In both presentation and gameplay, the game feels a lot like *Moto Racer* from Delphine, only on water.

There is really only one complaint, but it's one that's seriously detrimental to the enjoyment of this game: the positioning of the game's camera. When using the first-person view, things are a bit frenetic. This is natural, and even the best racers on PlayStation have the same problem. And like other racers, there is a behind-the-vehicle view that many gamers prefer in order to anticipate obstacles. But this is where the game drastically fails. Because the camera is so low, it's not really possible to follow the track, and all too often players end up turning directly into a wall. This is most problematic when jumping any of the numerous ramps in the game, which sends the camera below the player's boat, absurdly looking skyward. On one hand, the intent is to show how much air players are getting, but the effect takes players' attention away from the obstacles ahead, and trying to avoid them after such a glamour shot is terribly difficult.

That aside, the two-player mode (which suffers from the same camera shortcoming) is still pretty fun. The in-game options allow for playing the game on a horizontal or vertical split-screen. The game also has a good pace, and the water effects are done very well. Controlling each boat can be tough at first, but after some playing, it becomes intuitive. If only the game had more control over camera placement, it might have earned an extra star.

Rating: ★★

***Powerboat Racing* would have been better if the camera hadn't gotten in the way**

Punky Skunk

Publisher: **Jaleco**
Developer: **Visit**

If you've purchased a PlayStation to leave those 16-bit days behind, playing *Punky Skunk* will yank you right back. The flat imagery as well as the dull playability proves that Jaleco's platformer is just as much a stinker as this new "mammal with an attitude."

The graphics are the first indication that something's afoul. The game features nothing in the way of PlayStation effects, even those from the standard developer tools. Five years ago, this game would have been considered average; today it borders on criminal. Single-frame, low-color sprite animations make up the majority of this simplistic platform game that features (no surprise here) run, jump, and pounce-on-the-enemies gameplay. Oh, and since Punky's a skunk, he can excrete his odor to kill off the bad guys (it's even less charming than it sounds).

Even the bonus games — slot machines and childish matching games — lack any imagination. Either this game is a refugee from Super NES development, or some hack programmed this on the Yaroze.

One can't help but ask why. Why, in the days of powerhouse hardware, must someone design and release such a derivative side-scrolling platformer as *Punky Skunk*? Nuts to this — you might as well hook up your SNES and play *Zero, the Kamikaze Squirrel*.

Rating: ★

No, we didn't screw up end run e shot of e Super NES title — this is *Punky Skunk*

Speed Racer

Publisher: **Jaleco**
Developer: **Tomy**

The *Speed Racer* license is an obvious choice for a racing game. It was welcome news to hear that Jaleco had picked up the rights to do a polygonal racer, and tears of joy streamed down our faces as we watched the classic TV intro at the beginning of the game (all right — a slight exaggeration).

Unfortunately, our happiness was short-lived because while *Speed Racer* is a competent effort, it lacks the feel of the cartoon and comes off as just a mediocre *Ridge Racer* clone.

How much of a clone? Well, there is one large track split into three tracks, the graphics are almost exactly alike, and the same tweaked physics engine is used, which causes you to bounce off of other cars, even glancing a wall can bring you to a complete stop. In fact, we'd be tempted to say it's almost a shameless copy, but that would be discounting the added features of your car, the Mach 5.

There are a variety of gadgets at your disposal, ranging from spinning buzz saws on the front for cutting down trees to a periscope for driving underwater. Unfortunately, while these gadgets could have been used to add a little bit of life to the derivative gameplay, they are all useless except in specific shortcuts that allow you to go off the beaten track and get ahead of your opponents. All of this is well and good except that you are just as likely to win the race if you avoid the shortcuts because they're so difficult to get through, and they appear not to be any shorter distance.

Overall, *Speed Racer* has a solid license covering up a racing experience we all played when we bought our PlayStations two years ago. With all of the racing games coming down the pipeline this year, old technology and stale gameplay just don't make the cut. Tomy should have changed the opening song lyrics to "Go *Ridge Racer* Gooooo."

Rating: ★★

Speed Racer* was a better game without the buzz saws — when it was called *Ridge Racer

PC

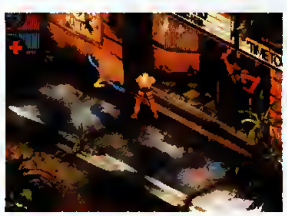
Alien Earth

Developer: **Beam Software**
Publisher: **Playmates Interactive**

In a sentence, *Alien Earth* is a graphically rich, 2D, isometric action/adventure, with the emphasis on the adventure rather than the action. The storyline is fairly typical. Aliens have come to Earth, destroyed most of it, and herded the few remaining humans into Iron Age-era villages, where people are bred for sport hunting. You play the latest unlucky victim, put out of the village to be hunted by the aliens. Thanks to your ingenuity and the rash of modern-era artifacts scattered about, though, you don't have to be alien fodder if you can solve the game's puzzles.

The graphics are lush, if slightly dark, and by sticking to 2D for the backdrops, the developers have created a very detailed environment. Also, the puzzles are logical and well-integrated into the overall theme of the game. They weren't the hardest we've come across — this is no *Spellbreaker* — but most were more than satisfying, and after an endless wave of button-pushing, switch-toggling "adventure" games, it was refreshing to see a game that relies largely on inventory-based puzzles.

On the downside, the game has an irritating loading screen that appears far too often as you maneuver across the environment. There's really little excuse for *Alien Earth* not doing the same kind of asynchronous background loading



If you're into action/adventura gemes, don't meke the mistake of overlooking *Alien Earth*

ON TARGET!

AeroFighters Assault Owners Give Game 90% Approval Rating!

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- Nintendo Power -

"The missions are diverse and interesting, and the enemy AI is very nicely done."
- Electronic Gaming Monthly -

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"You'd be hard pressed to find explosions, flames, and fighting aircraft as pretty as these."
- Ultra Game Players -

"It is rare that a console gets a title that stresses realistic flight control over arcade-style action, but this is exactly what Aerofighters Assault does."
- gamepen.com -

"...a very satisfying game playing experience that shouldn't be missed by any N64 owner that is even remotely interested in flight combat games."
- bird.taponline.com -

"Aerofighters' best qualities lie in its six realistic, highly maneuverable fighter jets(two are bonus jets)."
- NEXT GENERATION -

"This game is one of those ever-greentitles that will hang around the system forever."
- Q64 -

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KIDS TO ADULTS
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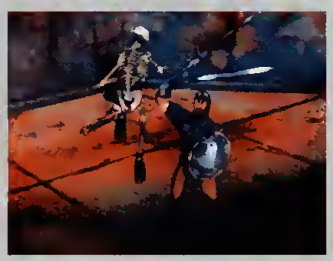
PC

Sharp

Treyarch gives gamers two quality games for the price of one

Die by the Sword

Publisher: **Tantrum (Interplay)**
Developer: **Treyarch**



From its groundbreaking combat system to its first-rate AI, *Die by the Sword* is praiseworthy indeed

Anyone around in the days of the Apple II undoubtedly remembers the classic game *Bilestoad*. It was the first fighting game to give players independent control of a fighter's shield and sword arms. Now, years later, the concept has been revisited by Treyarch with amazingly successful results. The character control is fantastic, and the game provides the perfect environment in which to exercise that control.

DBTS is essentially two games in one — an adventure mode that could stand by itself as a game of *Tomb Raider* standards, and a fighting engine that compares well to most modern brawlers. Players manipulate characters through an elaborate keypad-based control scheme that is daunting at first but becomes second nature as the game progresses. The weapon arm is independent of the body, enabling players to swing even while doing flips. And all appendages are removable — chopping off an enemy's arms and legs can take on Monty Python proportions as characters hop around on one leg, spewing insults.

The adventure mode is an intentionally campy throwback to games like *Karateka*, where the main character's girlfriend, in need of rescuing, lies unconscious in a place of evil. The adventure takes players to underground rivers and through situations where stealth is — at times — the only way to succeed. The game's AI is very complicated, making it feel as though players are matching wits with intelligent creatures as they rush to warn others or pull levers to drop gates. The game's cut scenes are done with in-game graphics, so they feel more consistent than those in most titles.

The multiplayer fighting engine is also impressive. While most fighters are one-on-one, *DBTS* can become a grudge match for up to four players — either computer AI or human — via LAN or Internet. One might expect a considerable processing hit with four people, but with a 28.8 modem and a solid connection, we found games very smooth, with a smart camera angle (it's customizable, as well). The game is expandable too — patches are already available to add taunts and new arenas.

DBTS's humorous slant on the all-too-serious fantasy genre is a welcome relief. In most respects, it is everything that games like *Deathtrap Dungeon* aspire to be. Tantrum has innovated in both story and gameplay at a time when most game companies are churning out derivative sequels and clones. Well, the gamble paid off. This title should not be missed by anyone seeking immaculately done fantasy action. Recommended.

Rating: ★★★★★

that *Final Fantasy VII* does. That specific complaint aside, we really enjoyed *Alien Earth*. Well-designed and (mostly) well-implemented, it might not be flashy, but the game possesses a depth and quality that marks it as one of the brighter spots in the lineup this month. An extra star is waiting if *Alien Earth 2* fixes the loading problems.

Rating: ★★★

Grand Theft Auto

Publisher: **ASC Games**
Developer: **DMA Design**

Grand Theft Auto is the game our mothers don't want us to play. It has foul language, crude references, illegal acts, and wanton destruction. To win, one must break the law, murder innocent people, and otherwise wreak general havoc. On the surface it sounds like a marketing gimmick, but accusing *Grand Theft Auto* of being superficial is to completely miss the point. Once play starts, it's obvious that there is an actual game under the surface — and it's a blast.

The beauty of *Grand Theft Auto* comes from its twisted simplicity. The entire game consists of running around town stealing cars and completing tasks for a mob boss in a quest for more money. Objectives range from blowing up a police station to retrieving loot from rival gang members. Each completed job adds to the player's personal pile of wealth.

The R/C-style control in *Grand Theft Auto* has a bit of a learning curve, but the game is a fun ride

With three cities and more than 6,000 square miles to explore, the levels of *Grand Theft Auto* are quite large and heavily populated with people and vehicles. There are more than 20 cars ranging from school buses to high-performance sports cars. Each vehicle has unique handling characteristics, as well as differing trade-in values. The simplest way to make money in *Grand Theft Auto* is basic car theft, and as every car thief knows, a sports car is worth more than a cab.

With an overhead R/C view style, *Grand Theft Auto* has a bit of a learning curve, but once mastered, the control is excellent. The game can be played with a keyboard, but it lends itself well to a gamepad.

It is quite easy to accuse *Grand Theft Auto* of being all style and no substance, but the charge doesn't stick. Of course, we don't condone the acts within, but there is no denying that the game itself is well-executed and quite enjoyable.

Rating: ★★★★

Sega Touring Car Championship

Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sega**

Touring Car Championship could have easily been a top-notch racing game for the PC. It has excellent racing mechanics, a driving dance-beat soundtrack, and a crisp, high-resolution option. Unfortunately, it is not 3D accelerated.

This absence is inexcusable. *Touring Car* is a game that was meant to be played fast. If the speed isn't there, the challenge disappears, and beating the computer is simple. In fact, running *Touring Car* in its high-resolution mode is the best way to cheat. The game is programmed to keep a smooth display, which it does by sacrificing speed. Whereas the Saturn version flew around the tracks, the PC version of *Sega Touring Car Championship* feels like an elegant ride through the countryside — pretty, but slow. The game's slower speed allows for increased reaction time and as a result, higher scores.

If only *Sega Touring Car* had shipped with 3D support, it would have been great

It's possible to bump up the frame rate by turning down the detail levels to a bare minimum, but then why bother playing? At the lowest settings, *Touring Car* is not a pretty sight.

As it stands, *Touring Car* is a decent choice for those without access to the Saturn version of the game (which is definitely superior). Sega has promised to release a Direct3D patch for *Touring Car*, which will enable the game to use 3D accelerators, but the time frame of the release is questionable. We're still waiting for the promised *Virtua Fighter 2* patch, and that was released how long ago?

Rating: ★★

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rating

Tex Murphy: Overseer

Publisher. **Access Software**
Developer. **Access Software**

Tex Murphy, the bumbling private investigator low on luck, is at it again *Overseer* tells the classic story of Murphy's very first case as a PI. A knockout dame walks into his office, tells him she thinks her father was murdered, and he takes the case

The interface is pretty much the same as the previous *Tex Murphy* game — you click around a 3D environment created with 2D sprites, navigating with the mouse There are lots of items to find, and even more puzzles to solve For those who aren't too interested in actually playing the game, there is an extensive help system that tells you how to solve the puzzle, or how to bypass it completely That's if you play in entertainment mode — if you play in gamer mode, there are more puzzles, and the solutions aren't nearly as simple

Either way you play it, though, you're subjected to pixelated environments and five CDs worth of FMV (although the game also comes with a single DVD disc for better video quality and less disc swapping) The acting is bad, certainly, but it could have been worse — the game's dubious star power is provided by the likes of Michael York and Rebecca Broussard

Die-hard fans of the *Tex Murphy* games will find more of what they like However, if you're looking for an adventure game that'll sweep you off your feet and make the hours fly by, look elsewhere

Rating: ★★

The 3D environments in *Overseer* are made up of 2D sprites. Pretty, but not lifelike

PC

In the zone

Battlezone

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Activision**

A 20-year-old gaming classic returns with a vengeance

Although some have looked at *Battlezone* and said, "I liked it better when it was called *Uprising*," the fact is that while the two games are exceptionally similar — realtime strategy/action games that take you out of the God mode and put you on the field — *Battlezone* has the upper hand.

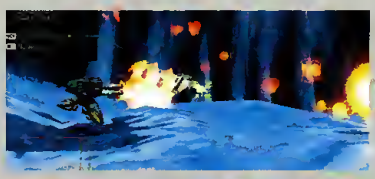
The game has little to do with the wire-frame classic — this is full, accelerated, free 3D combat The gameplay and controls are rock solid, and the levels are also exceptionally well-designed The see-sawing combat that is enabled by the recyling abilities of the main resource are amazing If you can successfully fight off a major attack on your base, you'll find all the resources you need to create your counterstrike on the battlefield.

Although some have complained about the interface, which puts HUD-style menus and submenus on the screen, we found it exceptionally intuitive. We also enjoyed the slightly retro feel of the ships, although, to be honest, we would have been more impressed if there had been a greater number of graphical references to the Apollo program. Still, the graphics in the game are solid and well-done with some excellent effects, notably the impressive ground-warping shock wave

The strategy side, which uses the AI from *Dark Reign*, is top-notch' Units are well-balanced, and enemy AI and tactics are smart. The action side is equally well-done, and the combination of both results in one of the most intense gaming experiences we've felt in quite a while If *Quake* occupies 100% of a certain portion of the brain, and if *Command & Conquer* can occupy 100% of another portion of your brain, *Battlezone* succeeds in occupying 80% of both. A really great session can leave you mentally exhausted.

As expected from Activision, a company with a growing reputation for creating top-notch mission-based games, the training mode is solid, and the mission difficulty ramps up well. There is, unfortunately, some of the, "Wait, I've done this before" tedium in some of the missions, but few mission-based games have completely escaped that — if testers find a mission that works well, the inclination is to include more levels of that type. We'll be interested to see how Activision builds on this very good start

Rating: ★★★★



Multiple environments and cool special effects add plenty of eye candy

This is not your father's *Battlezone*. Jumping in where *Uprising* showed the way, this game is far superior to its direct competition

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– Q64

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– EGM

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rating

Arcade

Motocross Go!
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **Namco**

Namco brings the outdoors into the arcade again with this uneventful misfire, a single-player dirt bike racer that requires gamers to muscle their way across muddy paths, around wide sloping turns, and off multiple jumps. *Motocross Go!* is simple, mindless racing that offers even less immersion than *Alpine Racer 2* — and that one isn't gritty or competitive enough to spark a second round of quarters.

In *Motocross Go!* you can knock opponents off their bikes — yet it's almost impossible for them to do the same to you. Oddity number two is that bashing into walls doesn't knock you off your bike either, providing all the effect of a single-vehicle bumper car event. Perhaps the best elements about *Motocross Go!* are its jumps, high speeds, and slides. The course contains many snaking turns — short, long, and some that are extremely wide, so powerslides are a must. Aside from jumps (in which you can pull off the obvious round of moves), these unimpressive powerslides are the crux of the game's skill curve. These elements should be mindbendingly exhilarating, but instead they end up without the tension and excitement of real physical dirt bike racing.

Next Generation always looks forward to Namco games, especially with the company's long winning streak — the entire *Tekken* series, *Soul Blade*, *Prop Cycle*, and a handful of other recent hits. But it's becoming clear that sport simulation games must reach a successful level of both realism and arcade simplicity to succeed. *Motocross Go!* is sure to fade like the expensive, forgettable set of jet ski units that most frugal arcade operators skipped without ever blinking.

Rating: ★★

NFL Blitz
Publisher: **Midway Entertainment**
Developer: **Midway Entertainment**

Midway couldn't have thought of a better game at a better time. While everyone is worrying about the best football simulation on the home front, Midway dug deep into its arcade past and dished up an immensely entertaining, immersive, gridiron coin-op of the first degree.

NFL Blitz takes its cues from the very first arcade game of this nature — a superb, trackball coin-op called *Football* — and takes it full-steam into the future. The same fake-the-long-bomb-and-run brilliance, sweeping runs, and long Hail Marys are all present and are complemented by sharp graphics and quick animation. There's nothing in the arcades like it.

Based on seven-on-seven-man teams, *NFL Blitz* lengthens the field a little bit by requiring 30-yard first downs (which are easy to get), but this enables several interesting, over-the-top strategies to make gameplay entertaining and challenging each time. Players can throw to any characters behind the line (who pass just as well as any QB), laterals are a dime a dozen, spins, hurdles, and straight-arms are all intact, and just like *NBA Hangtime*, a little turbo injection helps the running game like a shot of adrenaline.

Blitz is packed with great animation. Defensive players can pummel the crap

Cheerfully over-the-top, *NFL Blitz* makes little attempt at realism but is flat-out fun

out of the opposition during and after plays, and more than a handful of brutal tackles are available for your enjoyment. Several funny player audio lines and bone-breaking tackle sounds are thrown in for good measure, and the announcer who calls the plays with enthusiasm and loads of expletives is spot on.

A few letdowns appear after playing several games, manifesting themselves in the forms of a shrewd defensive AI that catches up near the end of a game and timely fumbles and turnovers that will set you fuming. Overall, though, *NFL Blitz* provides an unrealistic but adrenaline-packed experience.

Rating: ★★★★

***Motocross Go!* must have seemed like a good idea to someone, but comes across as an expensive novelty, and not much of a game**

***Rival Schools United by Fate* gets the prize for "longest title in an arcade game" — it's not all bad, though**

Rival Schools United by Fate
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom**

Japanese schoolgirls, anyone?

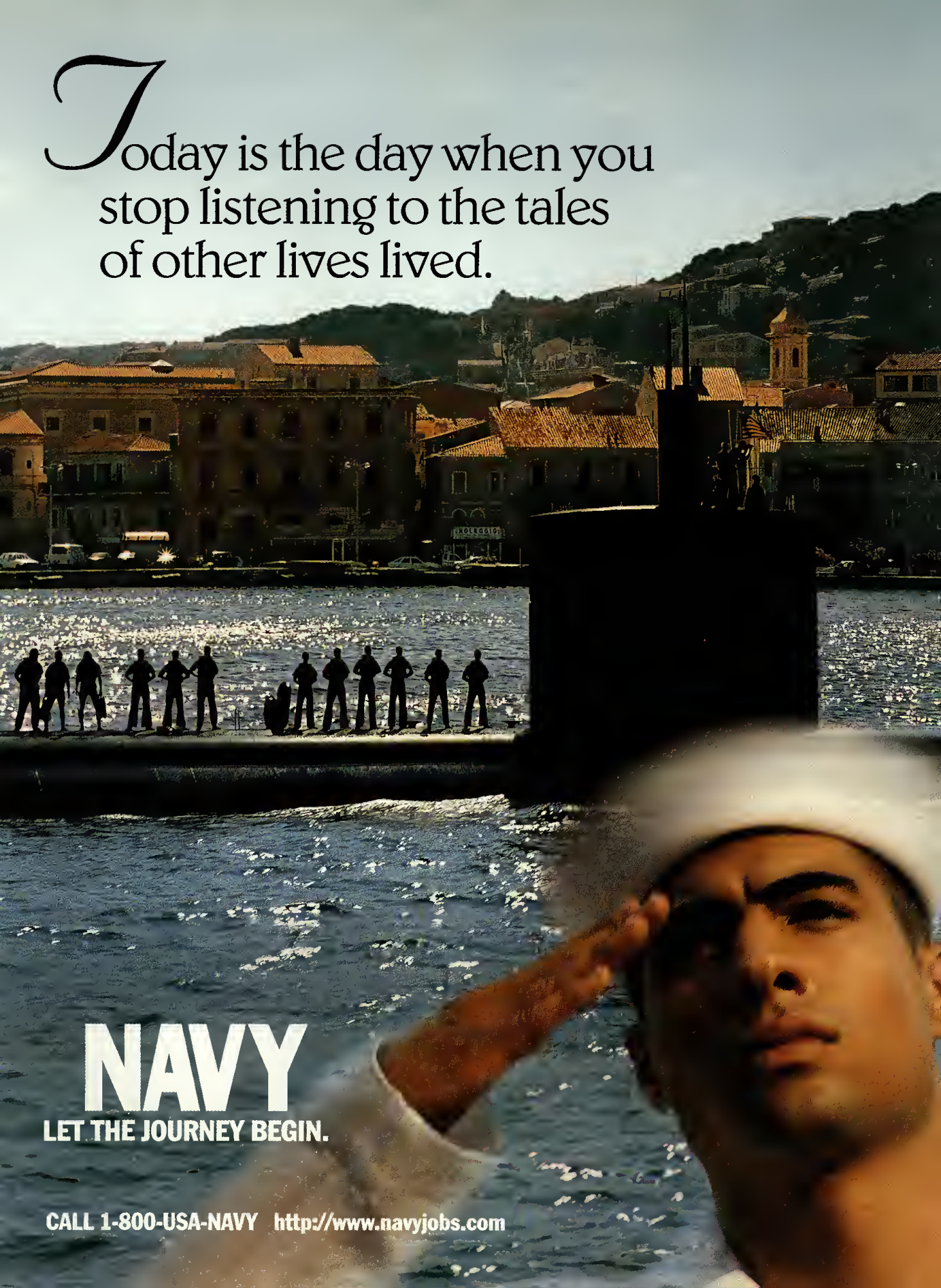
If you like 'em, they're a big part of the premise behind Capcom's third polygonal fighter, *Rival Schools United by Fate*. After *Star Gladiators* and *Street Fighter EX*, Capcom has cranked out a handful of 2D fighters over the past 10 years, but the 3D ones are few and far between. Unfortunately, this one is the lightest packing of the trio.

The fighting scheme is still *Street Fighter*–based, and the moves themselves are boiled-down versions of the essential *SF* moves, which helps make *Rival Schools* fun for any old Capcom fan. Everyone seems to pack a fireball of some kind, and flaming, spinning dragon punches are a dime a dozen. It's clear that this game is designed to appeal to beginners and old pros alike, but the latter get the short end of the stick. That's right, *Rival Schools* is a decent-playing, gorgeous game, but it ain't no *Street Fighter*. Or even an *X-Men* for that matter.

Graphically, *Rival Schools* is stupendous, with polygonal, anime-style character designs, clear attention to detail, and a wide playing field that's caught dramatically by a dynamically moving camera. The camera swings wide to catch full aerial encounters, which are plentiful and fun, and also swings around when Team Ups occur. Players start the game by choosing two characters, who can double up on the opponent for a novel bashing — always good for a chuckle because they're so brutal. Tardy Counters (counters), Rival Launchers (continuous aerial attacks), and Burning Vigor (youthful energy stored up like supermoves) round out the fighting mechanics and are all cool. Except for Team Ups, which could've been way cooler if players could change characters in the middle, this set of attacks is generous and deep.

To be honest, *Rival Schools* is a button masher, but it's good, clean button mashing, packaged a little differently. Aside from its moves and looks, the only problem *Rival Schools* has (besides its dumb, daytime drama name) is the characters. Will we ever see these high school students again? Do we really want to play a guy (Hideo) who looks like the school principal? Probably not.

Rating: ★★★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The Gamer's Guide

The quintessential guide to released software

How do you choose from the thousands of titles packing the shelves at your local store? Allow us to help. In this section, which makes a reappearance after more than a year's absence (during which time reviews were on the late **NG Disc**), we've recapped the scores from many of our reviews. Many of these games are no longer in print, but we've kept the rating listed because they are still available on some retailers' shelves. In the case of some reviews of import software, we have re-examined the U.S. release and included that rating here. Also, note the issue number — technology and game design marches on, so a game that got ★★★★ in **NG 6** might be hard-pressed to score ★★★ today.

Nintendo 64

Title	publisher	rating	#
Aero Fighters Assault	Video Systems Inc	★★★	36
Aero Gauge	Ascii	★★★	39
Automobili Lamborghini 64	Titus	★★	37
Blast Corps	Nintendo	★★★★	31
Clay Fighter 63 1/3	Interplay	★★	36
Cruisin' USA	Nintendo	★	26
Dark Rift	Vic Tokai	★★★	31
Diddy Kong Racing	Nintendo	★★★★	37
Doom 64	Williams	★★★	29
Duke Nukem 64	GT Interactive	★★★	37
Extreme-G	Acclaim	★★★★	37
F1 Pole Position 64	Ubi Soft	★★★	36
FIFA Road to the World Cup 64	Electronic Arts	★★★★	38
FIFA Soccer 64	Electronic Arts	★★	30
Fighter's Destiny	Ocean	★★★★	41
Goldeneye 007	Nintendo	★★★★★	34
Hexen	GT Interactive	★★	32
International Superstar Soccer	Konami	★★★★★	32
Killer Instinct Gold	Nintendo	★★	26
Mace: The Dark Age	Midway	★★	37
Madden 64	Electronic Arts	★★	37
Mario Kart 64	Nintendo	★★★	30
Multi Racing Championship	Ocean	★★★★	33
NBA Hangtime	Williams	★★	29
NBA In the Zone 64	Konami	★	41
Olympic Hockey '98	Midway	★	41
PilotWings 64	Nintendo	★★★★	21
QBC 64	Acclaim	★★★	37
Quake 64	Midway	★★★	41
Rampage World Tour	Midway	★★	41
Robotron 64	Crave Entertainment	★★★	39
San Francisco Rush	Midway Home	★★★★★	36
Shadows of the Empire	Nintendo	★★	26
Snowboard Kids	Atlus Software	★★★	40
StarFox 64	Nintendo of America	★★★★	32
Super Mario 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	21
Tetrisphere	Nintendo	★★★	35
Top Gear Rally	Midway	★★★★	37
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter	Acclaim	★★★	28
War Gods	Midway	★	31
WaveRace 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	25
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey	Midway	★★★	29
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98	Midway	★★	39
Yoshi's Story	Nintendo	★★	41
Yuke Yuke Troublemakers	Enix	★★★	34

PlayStation

Title	publisher	rating	#
2Xtreme	SCEA	★★	25
A Train	SCEA	★★★	04
Abe's Oddysee	GT Interactive	★★★★	35
Ace Combat 2	Namco	★★★★	35
Adidas Power Soccer	Psygnosis	★★★	21
Adventures of Lomax, The	Psygnosis	★★	26
Agile Warrior	Virgin	★★	13
Alien Trilogy	Acclaim	★★★★	18
Allundra	Working Designs	★★★★	38
Andretti Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★★	25
Aquanaut's Holiday	SCEA	★★★★	11
Arc the Lad	SCEA	★★★★	10
Area 51	Midway	★★	27
Armored Core	SCEA	★★★★	37
Atari Collection One, The	Midway	★★★★	27
Auto Destruct	Electronic Arts	★★★	39
BallBlazer Champions	LucasArts	★★★	31
Battlestations	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Beyond the Beyond	SCEA	★★	23
Black Dawn	Virgin	★★★★	23
Blast Chamber	Activision	★★★	25
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	Activision	★★★★	24
Bloody Roar	SCEA	★★★★	41
Bogey: Dead 6	SCEA	★★★	22
Bottom of the Ninth	Konami	★★★★	19
BRAHMA Force	Jaleco	★★★	30
Bravo Air Race	THQ	★★★	34
Breath of Fire III	Capcom	★★★★	41
Broken Helix	Konami	★★★	32
Bubsy 3D	Accolade	★★	26
Bug Riders	GT Interactive	★★	37
Burning Road	Playmates	★★★	27
Bushido Blade	Sony	★★★★★	31
Bust-a-Move	Enix	★★★★	41
Buster Bros. Collection	Capcom	★★★	30
Carnage Heart	SCEA	★★★★	28
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night	Konami	★★★★	36
Clock Tower	Ascii	★★★★	37
Codename: Tenka	Psygnosis	★★★	28
Colony Wars	Psygnosis	★★★★★	38
Contra: Legacy of War	Konami	★★★	25
Cool Boarders	SCEA	★★★	27
Cool Boarders 2	SCEA	★★★	37
Couner Crisis	GT Interactive	★	37
Crash 2: Cortex Strikes Back	SCEA	★★★★	37
Crash Bandicoot	SCEA	★★★	23
Criticom	Vic Tokai	★★	13
Croc: the Legend of the Gobbos	Fox Interactive	★★★	35
Crow: City of Angels, The	Acclaim	★	30
Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	★★★★	29
Cyberia	Interplay	★★★	16
CyberSled	Namco	★★	09
Cyberspeed	Mindscape	★★★	13
Dark Forces	LucasArts	★★★	26
Dark Stalkers	Capcom	★★★	16
Darklight Conflict	Electronic Arts	★★	34
Dead or Alive	Tecmo	★★★★	37
Deception	Tecmo	★★★	24
Defcon 5	Data East	★★★★	12
Descent	Interplay	★★★★	17
Descent Maximum	Interplay	★★★	29
Destruction Derby	Psygnosis	★★★★	11
Destruction Derby 2	Psygnosis	★★★★	25
Die Hard Trilogy	Fox Interactive	★★★★	23
Disney's Hercules	Virgin Interactive	★★	34
Disruptor	Universal Interactive	★★★★	24
Divide: Enemies Within, The	Viacom New Media	★★	28
Doom	Williams	★★★★	15
Dragon Ball GT Final Bout	Bandai	★	39
DragonHeart: Fire & Steel	Acclaim	★	28
Dynasty Warriors	KOEI	★★★★	32
Elnhander	SCEA	★★★★	40
Fade to Black	Electronic Arts	★★★★	21
Fantastic 4	Acclaim	★	35
Felony 11-79	Ascii	★★★	34
FIFA '97	Electronic Arts	★	26
Fighting Force	Eidos	★★★	37
Final Doom	Williams	★★★	24
Final Fantasy Tactics	SCEA	★★★★	40
Final Fantasy VII	SCEA	★★★★★	34
Floating Runner	THQ	★★	27
Formula 1	Psygnosis	★★★★★	24
Frank Thomas Baseball	Acclaim	★★	32
Frogger	Hasbro Interactive	★	37
Gameday '97	Sony	★★★★★	27
Gex	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	15
Ghost in the Shell	THQ	★★★	35
Goal Storm	Konami	★★★★	13
Goal Storm '97	Konami	★★★★	30
Gran Turismo	SCEI	★★★★★	40
Grand Slam	Virgin	★★	31
Grand Tour Racing '98	Activision	★★★	36
Grid runner	Virgin Interactive	★★★	23
Gunner's Heaven	Media Vision	★★★★	08
Gunship	MicroProse	★★	22
Hardball 5	Accolade Sports	★★	19
Herc's Adventures	LucasArts	★★★	35
Hot Shots Golf	SCE	★★★★	41
In the Hunt	THQ	★	14
In the Zone	Konami	★★★	14
In the Zone 2	Konami	★★★★	26
Independence Day	Fox	★★	29
Iron & Blood: Warriors of Ravenloft	Acclaim	★★	24
Jet Moto	SCEA	★★★★	27
Jet Moto 2	SCEA	★★★	37
Jumping Flash!	SCEA	★★★★★	08
Jumping Flash! 2	SCEA	★★★★	20
Jupiter Strike	Acclaim	★	15
K-1 The Arena Fighters	THQ	★★	30
Kileak: the Blood	SCEA	★★★	05
Kileak: the Blood 2	SCEA	★★	16
King's Field	Ascii	★★★★	16
King's Field II	Ascii	★★★	26
Krazy Ivan	Psygnosis	★★★	17
League of Pain	Psygnosis	★★★	30
Loaded	Interplay	★★★★	14
Lode Runner	Natsume	★★★	39
Lost World: Jurassic Park, The	Electronic Arts	★★	34
Machine Hunter	MGM Interactive	★	34
Madden '97	EA Sports	★★★★	24
Madden '98	Electronic Arts	★★★	35
MechWarrior 2	Activision	★★★★	31
Mega Man X 4	Capcom	★★★	36
MegaMan 8	Capcom	★★	29
Micro Machines V3	Midway	★★★★	39
Midway Collection 2, The	Midway	★★★★	38
MLB '98	SCEA	★★★	35
MLB Pennant Race	SCEA	★★	25
Monster Rancher	Tecmo	★★★★★	38
Mortal Kombat 3	Williams	★★★	12
Mortal Kombat Mythologies	Midway	★	38
Moto Racer	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	36
Motor Toon Grand Prix	SCEA	★★★★	26
Nagano Winter Olympics 98	Konami	★★★	39
Namco Museum Volume 1	Namco	★★★★	21
Namco Museum Volume 2	Namco	★★	24
Namco Museum Volume 3	Namco	★★★	27
Nanntiek Warrior	Virgin	★★★★	27
NASCAR Racing	Sierra	★★	24
NBA Jam Extreme	Acclaim	★★	28
NBA JAM TE	Iguana Entertainment	★★★★	12
NBA Live '96	Electronic Arts	★★★★	19
NBA Live '97	Electronic Arts	★★	25
NBA Shoot Out	SCEA	★★★	19
NBA Shoot Out '97	SCEA	★★★★	30
NCAA Gamebreaker	SCEA	★★★★	24
NCAA Gamebreaker '98	SCEA	★★★★★	38
Need For Speed II	Electronic Arts	★★	32
Newman/Haas Racing	Psygnosis	★★	41
NFL GameDay	SCEA	★★★★★	14
NFL GameDay '98	SCEA	★★★★★	35
NHL '97	Electronic Arts	★★★	25
NHL '98	Electronic Arts	★★★★	36
NHL Breakaway '98	Acclaim	★★★	37
NHL Face Off	SCEA	★★★★★	15
NHL Face Off '97	SCEA	★★★★	25
NHL Face Off '98	SCEA	★★★	36
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★★	38
Nuclear Strike	Electronic Arts	★★★	36
Olympic Soccer	U.S. Gold	★★★	21
One	ASC Games	★★	39
Open Ice Challenge	Midway	★★	28
Overblood	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Pandemonium	Electronic Arts	★★★	25
PaRappa the Rapper	SCEA	★★★★★	35
Peak Performance	Atlus	★★★	28
Perfect Weapon	ASC Games	★★	24
Persona	Atlus	★★★	27
PGA '98	Electronic Arts	★★★	36
PGA Tour Invitational '96	Electronics Arts	★★★	12
Philosoma	SCEA	★★	16
Pitball	Accolade	★★★	25
PO'ed	Accolade	★★★★	19
Point Blank	Namco	★★★	40
Porsche Challenge	SCEA	★★★★	35
Power Baseball	Konami	★	08
Power Move Wrestling	Activision	★★★	26
Power Serve 3-D Tennis	Ocean	★★★	12
Poy Poy	Konami	★★★★	33
Pro Pinball	Interplay	★★★	26
Project Overkill	Konami	★★★★	23
Project: Horned Owl	Sony	★★★	22
Psychic Force	Taito	★★	25
Rage Racer	Namco	★★★	32
Raiden	Seibu	★★	05
Rally Cross	Sony	★★★★	30
Rayman	Ubi Soft	★★★★	10
Re-Loaded	Interplay	★★	27
Rebel Assault 2	LucasArts	★★	26
Red Asphalt	Interplay	★★	37
Resident Evil	Capcom	★★★★★	17
Resident Evil 2	Capcom	★★★★★	39
Return Fire	Time Warner Interactive	★★★★	19
Ridge Racer	Namco	★★★★	04
Ridge Racer Revolution	Namco	★★	15
Road Rash	Electronic Arts	★★★	16
Robo Pit	THQ	★★★	22
Robotron X	Midway	★★★	27
Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV	Koei	★★★	18
Rush Hour	Psygnosis	★★★	32
Samurai Shodown III	SCEA	★★	25
Sentient	Psygnosis	★★★	30
Shadow Master	Psygnosis	★	41
Shellshock	US Gold	★★★★	19
Shipwreckers!	Psygnosis	★★★	38
Shockwave Assault	Electronic Arts	★★	15
Sidewinder	Asmik (Japan)	★★★	18
Silverload	Vic Tokai	★★★★	18

SimCity 2000	Maxis	★★★	23
Skullmonkeys	EA	★★	40
Slam 'N Jam	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	19
Slam Scape	Viacom	★	26
Soul Blade	Namco	★★★★	28
Soviet Strike	Electronic Arts	★★★★	24
Space Griffon	Atlus	★★	14
Space Hulk	Electronic Arts	★★★	21
Space Jam	Acclaim	★	27
Spawn The Eternal	SCEA	★	38
Spider	BMG	★★★	28
Spot Goes to Hollywood	Virgin Interactive	★	24
Star Gladiator	Capcom	★★★	24
Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi	LucasArts	★★	38
StarWinder	Mindscape	★★★	24
Steel Harbinger	Mindscape	★★★	24
Steel Reign	SCEA	★★	37
Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha	Capcom	★★★★	35
Street Racer	UbI Soft	★★★★	24
Suikoden	Konami	★★★★	25
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo	Capcom	★★★★	29
Syndicate Wars	Electronic Arts	★★★	34
Tail of the Sun	SCEA	★★★★	31
Tekken	Namco	★★★★	07
Tekken 2	Namco	★★★★★	20
Tempest X	Interplay	★★★★	24
Ten Pin Alley	ASC Games	★★★★	27
Test Drive 4	Accolade	★★	37
Thunder Truck Rally	Psygnosis	★★★	33
TigerShark	GT Interactive	★★★	29
Time Crisis	Namco	★★★★	38
TNN Hardcore 4X4	ASC	★★	26
Tobal No. 1	SCEA	★★★★	24
Toh Shin Den	Takara	★★★★	04
Tokyo Highway Battle	Jaleco	★★★	22
Tomb Raider II	Eidos	★★★★	37
Top Gun	Spectrum Holobyte	★★	20
Total Eclipse Turbo	Crystal Dynamics	★★	10
Toukon Retsuden	Tomy	★★★★	14
Triple Play '98	EA Canada	★★★★	31
Tunnel B1	Acclaim	★★★	25
Twisted Metal	SCEA	★★★★	13
Twisted Metal 2	SCEA	★★★★	30
Vandal Hearts	Konami	★★★★	29
Viewpoint	Electronic Arts	★	13
Virtua Fighter	Sega	★★★★	04
Virtual Pool	Interplay	★★★	27
VMX Racing	Playmates Interactive Ent.	★★	36
VR Baseball '97	Interplay	★★	30
Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat	Mindscape	★★★	28
Warhawk	SCEA	★★★★	13
WCW Nitro	THQ Inc	★★★	38
WCW Vs The World	T•HQ	★★	30
Wild Arms	SCEA	★★★★	32
Wing Commander IV	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Wipeout	Psygnosis	★★★★★	11
Worms	Ocean	★★★★	19
WWF Wrestlemania	Acclaim	★★★★	12
X-Com UFO Defense	MicroProse	★★★★★	14
X-Men Children of the Atom	Acclaim	★★	40
Xevious 3D/G+	Namco	★★★	31
Zero Divide	Time Warner	★★★	14

Title	publisher	rating	#
Online			
Command and Conquer: Sole Survivor	Westwood	★	41
Meridian 59: Revelation	3DO	★★★	37
Netstorm	Activision	★★★★	40
NetWAR	Headland	★★★	41
Tanarus	Sony	★★★★	40
Ultima Online	Origin	★★★★	37

Title	publisher	rating	#
PC			
11th Hour, The	Virgin	★★	16
1830: Railroads and Robber Barons	Avalon Hill	★★	08
688(I) Hunter/Killer	Jane's Combat Simulations	★★★★	34
A Fork in the Tale	Anyriver	★	30
Abuse	Crack dot Com	★★★★	14
Advanced Tactical Fighters	Electronic Arts	★★★★	19
Afterlife	LucasArts	★★★	23
Age of Empires	Microsoft	★★★★	37
AH-64D Longbow	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	21
Air Warrior II	Interactive Magic	★★★★	31
Air Warrior III	Interactive Magic	★★★	40
Albion	Blue Byte	★★★★	23
Allied General	Mindscape	★★★★	18
Amber: Journeys Beyond	Graphic Simulations	★★★	27
American Civil War	Interactive Magic	★★★★	22
Andretti Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★★	39
Apache	Interactive Magic	★★★★★	11
Arcade America	7th Level	★★★	17
Armored Fist	Novalogic	★★★★	02
Ascendancy	Broderbund	★★★★	12
Atlantis: The Lost Tales	Interplay	★★★	35
Azrael's Tear	Mindscape	★★★	25
Bad Mojo	Pulse Entertainment	★★★	17
Balor of the Evil Eye	Koei	★★★★	10
Banzai Bug	Groiler	★★★	30
Battle Beast	7th Level	★★★	12
Battleground Waterloo	TalonSoft	★★★★	22
Battlespire	Bethesda	★★★	41
Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	17
Beavis and Butt-head	Viacom NewMedia	★★★★	14
Bedlam	GT Interactive	★★★	26
Betrayal in Antara	Sierra	★★★	34
Big Red Racing	Domark	★★★	19
Blade Runner	Virgin	★★★★	39
Blood	GT Interactive	★★★★	33
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	Activision	★★	36
Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror	Virgin Interactive	★★★	36
Buried in Time: The Journeyman Project 2	Sanctuary Woods	★★★★	13
C.E.O.	I•Motion	★★	11
Caesar II	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	14
Capitalism	Interactive Magic	★★★★	13
Carmageddon	SCI	★★★★	33
CART Precision Racing	Microsoft	★★★★	38
Casino Deluxe	Impressions Software	★★★	11
Cat Fight	Atlantean Interactive	★	22
Chaos Overloads	New World Computing	★★★	21
Chronomaster	Capstone	★★★★	16
Circle of Blood	Virgin	★★★★	24
City of Lost Children, The	Psygnosis	★★	32
Civilization II	MicroProse	★★★★★	19
Close Combat	Microsoft	★★	22
Colonization	MicroProse	★★★★	01
Comanche 3	NovaLogic	★★★	33
Command & Conquer	Virgin	★★★★★	12
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Virgin	★★★★	25
Conquest of the New World	Interplay	★★★	20
Creatures	Mindscape	★★★★★	35
Crusader: No Remorse	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	13
Curse of Monkey Island, The	LucasArts	★★★	39
CyberMage	Origin	★★★	17
CyberSpeed	Mindscape	★	18
D-Day: America Invades	Avalon Hill	★★★★	11
Dark Earth	MicroProse	★★★	37
Dark Forces	LucasArts	★★★	05
Dark Reign	Activision	★★★★	38
Death Drome	Viacom	★★★	29
Death Rally	Apogee Software	★★★	27
DeathKeep	SSI	★	22
Deep Space Nine: Harbinger	Viacom NewMedia	★	19
Delta V	Bethesda	★★	01
Descent	Interplay	★★★★	05
Descent II	Interplay	★★★★	18
Descent to Undermountain	Interplay	★	41
Destruction Derby	Psygnosis	★★★★	14
Diablo	Blizzard	★★★★	28
Dig, The	LucasArts	★★★★	15
Dinotopia	Turner Interactive	★★★	20
Discworld	Psygnosis	★★★	05
Discworld II: Mortality Bytes!	Psygnosis	★★★	32
Doom 2	Good Times	★★★	01
Dragon Dice	Interplay	★	35
Druid	Sir-tech	★★★★	17
Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms	★★★★	20
Dungeon Keeper	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	33
Dungeon Master II	Interplay	★★	12
EarthSiege 2	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	20
Earthworm Jim 1 & 2	Playmates	★★★★	21
Ecco the Dolphin	Sega	★★★	15
Ecstatica 2	Psygnosis	★★★★	30
EF2000 v2.0	Ocean of America, Inc.	★★★★	36
Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall, The	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★★	24
Emperor of the Fading Suns	SegaSoft	★★★★	32
Empire 2: The Art of War	New World Computing	★★	14
Entomorph	SSI	★★★	14
Excalibur 2555 A.D.	Sir Tech	★★	37
Extreme Assault	Blue Byte	★★	35
F-22 Lightning II	NovaLogic	★★	25
F1 Racing Simulation	UbI Soft	★★★★	39
Fable	Sir-tech	★★★	31
Faery Tale Adventure II	Encore Software	★★	40
Fallen Haven	Interactive Magic	★★	32
Fallout	Interplay	★★★★	38
FIFA '96 Virtual Stadium Soccer	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	13
Fire Fight	Electronic Arts	★★★★	21
Frankenstein	Interplay	★	17
Front Page Sports: Pinball '97	Sierra	★★	29
Full Tilt Pinball	Maxis	★★	15
Fury3	Microsoft	★	13
FX Fighter	GTE Interactive	★★★★	09
G-Nome	7th Level	★★	30
G-Police	Psygnosis	★★★★	38
Grand Prix Manager	Spectrum Holobyte	★★	17
Hardball 5	Sport Accolade	★★★	14
Havoc	Reality Bytes, Inc.	★★★★	16
Heavy Gear	Activision	★★★	39
Heretic	Id Software	★★★★	05
Heroes of Might and Magic	New World Computing	★★★★	12
Hexen: Beyond Heretic	Id Software	★★★★	14
Hi-Octane	Electronic Arts	★★★★	10
Hind	Interactive Magic	★★★★	25
Hive, The	Rainbow America	★★	16
Hunter Hunted	Sierra	★★	27
Hyper 3-D Pinball	Virgin	★★★★	18
Icebreaker	Twentieth Century Fox	★★★	20
IF-22 Raptor	Interactive Magic	★★★	35
Imperium Galactica	GT Interactive	★★★★	33
Interactive Fiction Collections	Activision	★★★★★	10
Interstate '76	Activision	★★★★	31
Into the Void	Playmates	★★★	33
Isle of Four Winds: Rune War, The	Arcanum Productions	★★★	39
Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II	LucasArts	★★★★★	36
Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith	LucasArts	★★★★	41
Jetfighter III	Interplay	★★★★	29
Journeyman Project 3	Red Orb	★★★★	41
Knight Moves	Spectrum HoloByte	★★	15
Knight's Chase	I-Motion	★★	21
Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny	Westwood Studio	★★★	37
Last Bounty Hunter, The	American Laser Games	★★	12
Last Express, The	Broderbund	★★★★	31
Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love for Sail	Sierra	★★★	25
Lemmings Paintball	Psygnosis	★★★	22
Lighthouse	Sierra	★★	25
Links LS	Access	★★★★	24
Lion	Sanctuary Woods	★★★★	15
Lords of the Realm	Impressions	★★★★	03
Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	★★★★	28
M.A.X.	Interplay	★★★★	30
M1A2 Abrams	Interactive Magic	★★★	32
Mageslayer	GT Interactive	★★★★	37
Magic Carpet 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	13
Magic: The Gathering	Spectrum Holobyte	★★	31
Manic Karts	Virgin Interactive	★	22
Master of Orion II	MicroProse	★★★	28
MDK	Playmates	★★★★	31
Meat Puppet	Playmates Interactive	★★★	34
MechWarrior 2	Activision	★★★★	10
MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	★★★★	25
Micro Machines 2	GameTek	★★★	21
Mirage	Atlantis Interactive	★	11
Mission Critical	Legend Entertainment Co.	★★★★	15
Monster Truck Madness	Microsoft	★★★★	26
Monty Python and the Holy Grail	7th Level	★★	22
Mordor	TDAI	★★	12
Mortal Kombat 3	Williams	★★★★	10
Moto Racer GP	BMG	★★★★★	31
Myth	Bungie	★★★★	38
NASCAR Racing 2	Sierra On-Line	★★★	40
NBA Full Court Press	Microsoft	★★	26
Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure	Sir Tech Software	★★★	27
NeoHunter	Virgin Interactive	★	27
Neverhood, The	DreamWorks Interactive	★★★	24
NFL Pro League Football	Micro Sports	★★★	11
NHL '97	Electronic Arts	★★★★	24
NHL Hockey '96	Electronic Arts	★★★★	13
Nitro Racers	3DO (Europe)	★★★★	28
Noctropolis	Electronic Arts	★★★★	03
Noir: A Shadowy Thriller	Cyberdreams	★★	27
Normality	Interplay	★★★	23
Obsidian	SegaSoft	★	30
Orion Conspiracy, The	Domark	★	09
Outlaws	LucasArts	★★★	32
Pandora Directive, The	Access Software	★★★★	24
Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain	THQ	★★	37
PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	★★	01
Phantasmagoria	Sierra On-Line	★★★	12
Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh	Sierra	★★★	27
Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure	Activision	★★★	10
Pizza Tycoon	MicroProse	★★★★	06
Pod	UbI Soft	★★★	31
Police Quest: SWAT	Sierra On-Line	★★	16
Pool Champion	Mindscape	★	21
Postal	Ripcord	★★★★	37
Powerhouse	Impressions	★★★★	10
Powerslave	Playmates	★★	30
Princess Maker 2	Ignite	★★★	32
Prisoner of Ice	I•Motion	★★★	12
Private Eye	Simon & Schuster	★★	22
Privateer 2: The Darkening	Origin/EA	★★★★	29
Pure Wargame: Vol. 1	QQP	★★★	08
Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom	Learn Technologies	★	23
Quake	id Software	★★★★★	22
Quake 2	Activision	★★★★	39
Quarantine	GameTek	★★★★	01
RAMA	Sierra	★★	26
Rayman	UbI Soft	★★★	18
Realms of Arkania II: Shadows Over Riva	Sir Tech	★★★★	33
Realms of Arkania: Star Trail	Sir Tech	★★★	03
Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	★★★★	30
Rebel Assault II	LucasArts	★★	15
Red Baron II	Sierra	★★★★	40
Redneck Rampage	Interplay	★★★	32
Relentless	Electronic Arts	★★★★	01
Renegade	SSI	★★★★	06
Renegade II: Return to Jacob's Star	SSI	★★	19
Retribution	Gremlin Interactive	★★	05
Riddle of Master Lu, The	Sanctuary Woods	★★★★	13
Ripper	Take 2 Interactive	★★★	18
Rise of the Robots	Time Warner Interactive	★★	03
Rise of the Triad	Apogee	★★★	06
Riven	Red Orb	★★★	36
Rocket Jockey	SegaSoft	★★★★	27
Sabre Ace: Conflict Over Korea	Virgin Interactive	★★★	38
Savage Warriors	Mindscape	★★★	11
Scarab	Electronic Arts	★★★	30
Scorched Planet	Virgin	★★	28
Screamer	Virgin	★★★★	17
Screamer 2	Virgin	★★★★	25
Sega Rally	Sega	★★★	30
Sentient	Psygnosis	★★	33
Separation Anxiety	Acclaim	★	17
Shanghai: Great Moments	Activision	★★★★	06
Shannara	Legend Entertainment	★★	17
Shattered Steel	Interplay	★★★	26
Shell Shock	Eidos Interactive	★★	23
Shivers	Sierra On-Line	★★★	17
Shivers 2: Harvest of Souls	Sierra On-Line	★★	32
Sid Meier's Gettysburg	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	37
Silent Thunder: A-10 Tank Killer II	Sierra On-Line	★★	20
Sim Isle	Maxis	★★	13
SkyBorg, Into the Vortex	Fringe Multimedia	★	16
Slipstream 5000	Gremlin Interactive	★★★	07
Space Bar, The	Boffo Games	★★★★	33
Space Bucks	Sierra	★	18
Space Quest 6	Sierra	★★★	10
SpaceDude	Everyware	★	21
Spycraft: The Great Game	Activision	★★★★	19
Star Command Revolution	GT Interactive	★★	31
Star Control 3	Accolade	★★★★	25
Starfleet Academy	Interplay	★★★	36
Stonekeep	Interplay	★★★★★	13
Streets of Sim City	Maxis	★	40
Strife	Velocity	★★★	20
SU-27 Flanker	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	★★	15
Sub Culture	UbI Soft	★★★★	37
Super Stardust '96	GameTek	★	21
Syndicate Wars	Electronic Arts	★★★★	25
TekWar	Capstone	★	14
Temujin	SouthPeak Interactive	★★★	38
Terminal Velocity	Apogee	★★	11
Terminator: Future Shock	Bethesda Softworks	★★	16
Terminator: SkyNET	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★★	26
Terra Nova	Looking Glass	★★★★	19
Test Drive Off Road	Accolade	★★	31
Theme Hospital	Bullfrog/Origin	★★★★	31
Thexder	Sierra	★★	16
Toonstruck	Virgin	★★★	26
Top Gun	Spectrum Holobyte	★★	18
Tonn's Passage	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	15
Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	★★★★	36
Total Mayhem	Domark	★★	21
Total Pinball 3D	21st Century	★★	21
Tracer	7th Level	★★★	22
Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	★★★★	04
Transport Tycoon Scenario	MicroProse	★★★	06
Twinsen's Odyssey	Activision	★★★★	34
U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	★★★★	03
Under a Killing Moon	Access	★★★★	02
Uprising	Cyclone Studios	★★★★★	37
Virtua Pool	Interplay	★★★★★	09
Virtua Pool 2	Interplay	★★★★★	38
Virus	Sirtech	★★	40
VR Soccer	VR Sports	★★★	20
Wages of War	3DO	★★	28
Warcraft 2: Tides of Darkness	Blizzard Entertainment	★★★★★	15
Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat	Mindscape, Inc.	★★★	16
Warlords III: Reign of Heroes	Red Orb Entertainment	★★★	35
Werewolf vs. Comanche	Nova Logic	★★★	13
Westworld 2000	Byron Preiss Multimedia	★	27
Wetlands	New World Computing	★★	15
Whiplash	Interplay	★★★★	18
Williams Arcade Classics	Williams	★★★★	15
Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom	Origin	★★★★	18
Wing Commander: Prophecy	Electronic Arts	★★★★	40
Wing Nuts	Rocket Science	★★★	13
Wipeout XL	Psygnosis	★★★★	33
Witchaven II: Blood Vengeance	Intracorp	★★	22
X-COM: Apocalypse	MicroProse	★★★	35
X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	★★★★	07
X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	★★★	32
XCar: Experimental Racing	Bethesda Softworks	★★★	35
Z	Virgin	★★★★	23
Zone Raiders	Virgin	★★★★	16
Zork: Grand Inquisitor	Activision	★★★★	39

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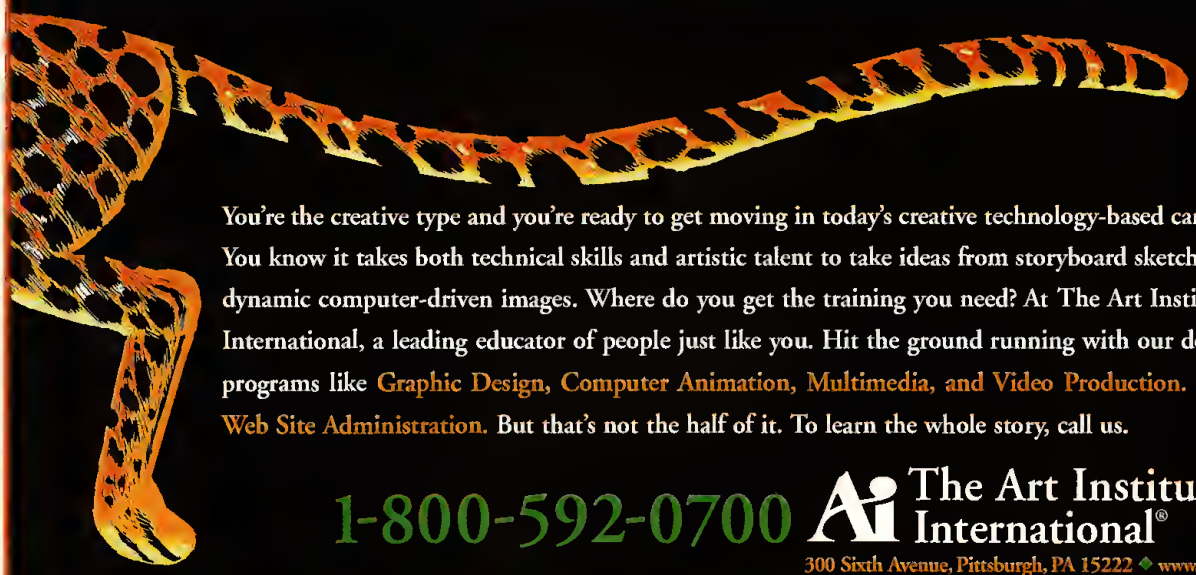

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letters

Fine examples of the mail species

A couple of points on "The game industry's greatest failures" (**NG 40**):

1) To say that *E.T.* suffered the consequences of the poor performance of *Pac-Man* is absurd! *E.T.* was an abortion from the start. Howard Warshaw did an impossible job technically, but it was still not possible to develop a product in the framework offered by management! If Howard made a mistake, it was in letting the "suits" continue to believe that what they were asking was remotely feasible, or that the outcome would be worthwhile!

2) The quotes from the coin-op guys are hilarious. Coin-op was clueless! They had NO idea of what the 2600 was about. They work(ed) within very real limitations, but those limitations are so far removed from the 2600's that comprehension was improbable at best!

3) Somehow the slant of that article implies that there were no people who enjoyed playing 2600 *Pac-Man*. Get a grip. Most likely there were vastly more people who had fun for a while (isn't that what it is about?) than there were reporters with a bad attitude about the game 15 years later. Many more people have fond memories of the game than otherwise!

4) The great thing is that seeing this sort of stuff reminds me (for a while) that I should take everything in the press with a grain of salt.

Tod Frye
Programmer, 2600 *Pac-Man*

There's probably not much point in continuing the Atari coin-op vs home division battle, but just for the record, at least one coin-op programmer, Ed Logg, did a 2600 project (*Othello*) in his spare time.

Once again the frightened masses search for simple scapegoats instead of looking into more personally troubling reasons for a tragedy that has befallen a community.

As the people of Jonesboro, with the media's prodding, sought answers to how two children in a good, God-fearing community could kill four girls and a teacher, a local official speculated that the reason must be how much time one of the perpetrators spent playing videogames. This is the same old pop-culture-as-devil blame game that we've seen so often.

Ignore the pervasive gun culture in the region that promotes the early, frequent, and largely indiscriminate use of firearms. Ignore the backward culture that teaches the second-class citizenship of women. Ignore the culture of teaching violence early with a rampant domestic abuse rate that is largely winked at as an internal family matter. Ignore the Bible-Belt ("Believe like we do or we'll belt you with a Bible") culture that makes anyone who doesn't think and believe like "everyone else" evil and thus not worthy of community support. Ignore the fact that obsessive/compulsive behavior, even playing too many videogames, is a symptom of, not a cause of deeper psychological problems.

No, it's just easier to blame a form of entertainment that isn't made locally. Don't examine the community or its values to see if they created a pair of monsters in their midst — someone may actually begin to question the dearly held mores of the culture. Just blame the latest bit of pop culture, lock away the bad kids, bury the dead (along with the real causes for the loss), and go back to living life like you always have.

I'm not just showing regional prejudice — I was born in Georgia, grew up in Alabama, and currently live in Tennessee. I was raised in the very culture I speak of. I shot my first rifle at the age of eight, and I've seen all I have cited above firsthand.

As videogames are the latest mass-market pop phenomenon, I guess it's only fair that they take their turn as the whipping boy, just as comic books and rock music took their turns and countless others did before them. Perhaps something else will come along soon to replace videogames in the role of scapegoat. Until then, I hope kids will continue to enjoy playing videogames and give their parents something harmless to worry about. Tackling a real problem, like drug abuse, might be a little awkward as we sip our much-needed evening scotch and sodas.

Jayson Hill
Knoxville, TN

A bit pedagogical, but well-said.

In **NG 39** you mentioned that you print corrections. Well, in the same issue — in the same section, in fact — you said the game *Grim Fandango* from LucasArts would feature a graphical theme from the Mexican Day of the Dead, "Dia de las Muertes." Any Mexican like myself will tell you that you've made a slight spelling error. The correct name is "Dia de Los Muertos." It's a minor thing, really. All it does is change the "gender" of the word "muerte," which means "death." But in Spanish such a silly little thing changes the meaning of the phrase entirely.

You see, the words muerto and muerta are the adjectives that describe a dead man and dead woman respectively. The word muerte describes death itself, as in the phrase, "Death comes to us all." Curiously, this noun muerte is feminine (nouns almost always have genders in Spanish). So when you say "Dia de las Muertes," you are more or less saying, "The Day of the Deaths," like the day when lots of "deaths" occurred, as opposed to the day celebrating the dead (people).

A Spanish detail called a "tilde," which without a special keyboard you can only type through a code, is also missing from the "i" of the word "dia." It is a slanted little thing and goes in place of the dot.

Hope you didn't mind my little lesson, and if you should find any errors in MY spelling, please feel free to point them out. If I have any, I shall have to write a very angry letter to Microsoft about its "spell

Hey look, we're experts on video and computer games, not Mexican culture and Spanish grammar — cut us some el slacko already

corresponding

check" function.

Dr. Raúl Ortiz Monasterio
Santa Ana, CA

We got our most knowledgeable and trusted in-house Spanish expert to come up with a response. "Gracias por la correcion! Esos cuates de Next-Gen son idiotas."

In response to the request for information about hands-free controllers (**NG 40**) I would like to offer the following URL: http://www.madenta.com.

This is a company that manufactures computer input devices for the physically impaired. I hope it has what you're looking for.

Joe Dunford

Indeed it does. Thank you.

After reading your interview with Greg Fischbach in your April issue, I was ready to accept that Acclaim had turned over a new leaf. However, that change of heart is now being questioned. On Monday, I got on the Acclaim web site and saw descriptions of new projects. One of the projects was a game based on "South Park"! What gives? There really seems to be no way for Acclaim to say that this is anything but making a game based on the licensing of another aspect of popular culture. According to history, these games are set up for failure. I wonder if it will be as good as any of Acclaim's *Simpsons* games?

Ryan Carson
CARSONR@auste654b.aust.tdprs.state.tx.us

Acclaim does seem to be a bit like a recovering license addict — and "backsliding." However, since in this case neither we, nor anyone else has seen any gameplay (*South Park* isn't even into planning stages yet), we'll reserve judgment.

Call me crazy, but I thought the hardcore gamer poll in **NG 38** was unfairly biased towards console and arcade gamers. There were several PC questions (kudos to whomever thought of the Infocom question), but not enough for someone like myself (whose only game machine is a PC and will keep it that way) to even come close to qualifying as hardcore. I've only played about an hour or so's worth of *Mario* games — and that includes the entire series — and merely a few seconds of *Sonic*. Yet I've been playing PC games since I was six and would certainly rank as hardcore if the right questions were asked. Since it would be hypocritical of me not to suggest PC questions, here are a meager few (categorization is up to you, I'm afraid).

1) In *The Secret of Monkey Island*, what is the appropriate answer to the insult, "You fight like a dairy farmer"? (Bonus point: You use the insult and/or the answer in real-life arguments.)

2) You remember the highest position you retired at in *Sid Meier's Pirates*.

3) You utterly destroyed a town in *SimCity* (or *SC2K*) and then rebuilt it and made it even better.

4) You've designed your own *Quake 1* or *2* map or mod. (Bonus point: It got critical acclaim.)

This should be ample fodder to get some ideas flowing for a PC poll, which I really hope you get started. It'd be a shame if hardcore PC gamers couldn't feel gratified.

Roger Fingas
fingas@sympatico.ca

1) "How appropriate, you fight like a cow." (Note: Do not use in bar fights.)
2) Governor, of course. Found the treasure the first day.
3) Doesn't everyone?
4) Too busy hacking the GL driver to run faster.

And FYI: Infocom trivia contests are a regular pastime around here.

I immensely enjoyed your special report on "What the hell happened?" to some of the most hyped games in the software industry. This is the kind of reporting I can only expect from such a great magazine as **Next Generation**.

I couldn't help but chuckle when I read the page about *Rise of the Robots*. At the time it was about to be released, I was given the assignment of reviewing it for a major computer game magazine. After getting one of the first playable copies, I called up its PR lady and said, point-blank, "The control is terrible!" Time Warner's response? It pretended to not know what I was talking about and said I wasn't a true gamer. The next day, it sent up a new build of the game with a yellow Post-it note that said, "We hope that this version has better 'control' in it for you," and ended the note with a little smiley face, as if to suggest I didn't know what I was talking about.

I certainly did know what I was talking about. *Rise of the Robots* was a disaster, and I want to thank **Next Generation** for exposing the behind-the-scenes story of what really happened.

And *Toonstruck* cost $8 million? Ouch! I hope Christopher Lloyd at least worked for scale.

Geoff Keighley
Editor, Gameslice

And in the other corner:

NG 40 was another great issue, but I feel compelled to make a minor correction to your report, "The game industry's greatest failures." I believe the text after the header, "What actually happened" for the game *Toonstruck* was somehow garbled by grammar-correcting software and should instead read:

"Despite the logical formula of wedding a multimillion-dollar project to a multimillion-dollar marketing strategy, shipping delays, coupled with a lack of communication and negligence among Virgin management, resulted in the promotional budget being expended early on (the ad campaign ran a full year before the actual release and ended six months prior) such that on her wedding day, *Toonstruck* was left standing at the altar. The failure here is not in bringing a quality title to market but in failing to market a quality title."

I'm sure this is what you meant — not that nonsense about super-high-quality animation or ancient Westwood technology. The animation, be it extremely expensive, is clearly Saturday-morning-cartoon quality. And what you call a "setback" was simply the preproduction phase — it was in the last months of this phase that the WW engine was ported to a 32-bit platform. There weren't even

The "What the hell happened" feature in NG 40 resulted in a handful of additional anecdotes from the trenches

any programmers on board for the first year.

When you subtract this 18-month preproduction phase (spent creating characters, setting, story, and plot; lining up voice talent; writing dialogue; contracting the animation; implementing production tools and processes; as well as staffing the team), the game was actually implemented in 18 months. That's not bad for a "ridiculously ambitious project," especially when you consider that video, audio, and animation assets were still being delivered just weeks before the product shipped.

In many ways, *Toonstruck* is the antithesis of the failures presented in your article. Whereas consumers have been burned time and again by corporate greed, marketing hype, and negligent management, this is one instance where these same forces have simply burned themselves and left a treasure for the taking. Virgin has tossed *Toonstruck* into the bargain bin, where it may be found for around $10. I encourage your readers to get their eight million dollar's worth.

Michael Gater
gater@earthlink.net

In other words, so much attention was paid to the animation and storyboards that nobody even thought to bring in programmers to work on the actual gameplay until a year into "preproduction," and then, despite this art-heavy emphasis, some portions of the animation and sound were still unfinished up until just before it was pushed out the door. At which point, it was released to mostly lackluster reviews and sluggish sales. Gee, you're right — all the earmarks of a truly quality product.

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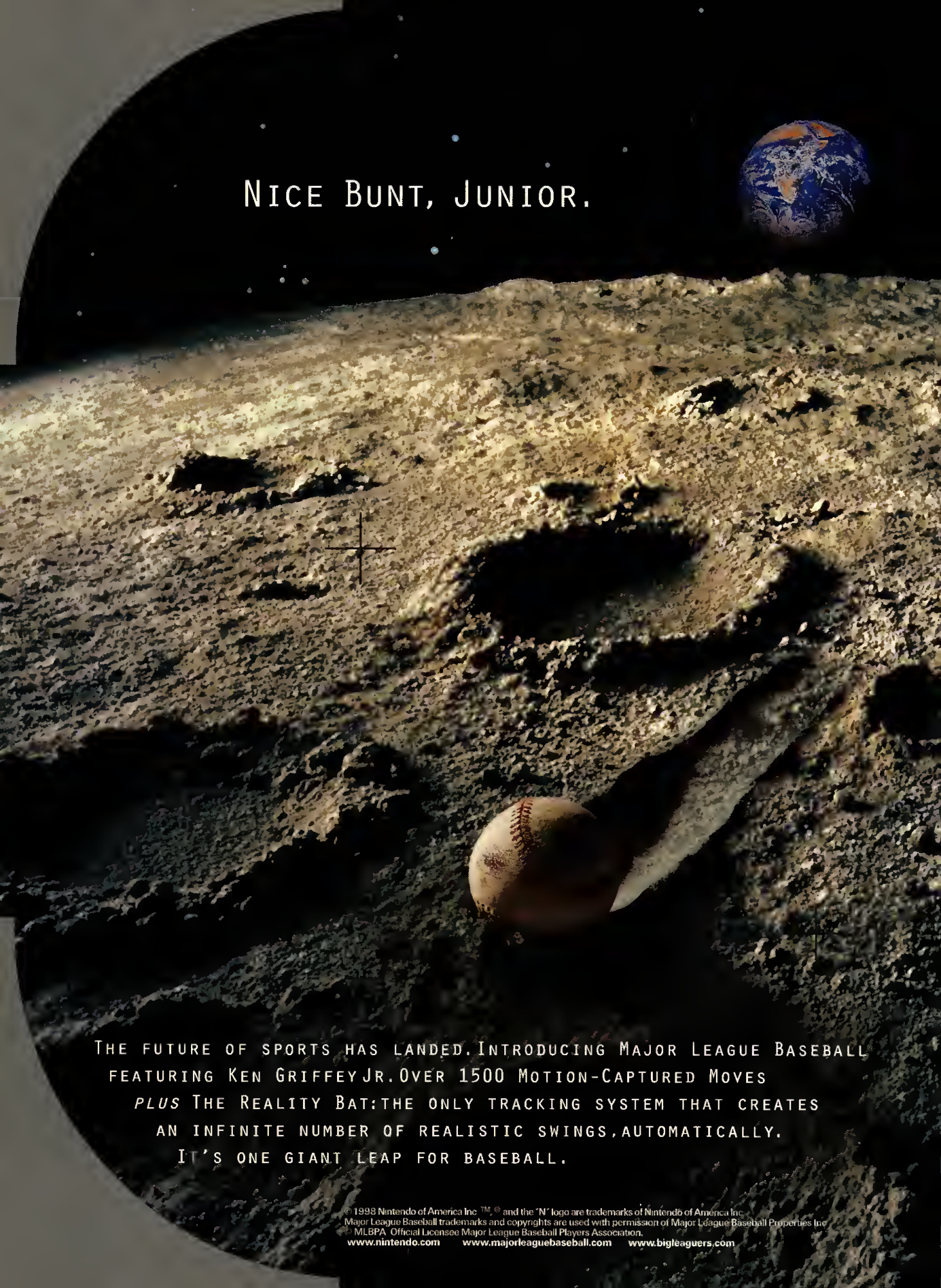
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